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## Footnotes from "The Christian Character of Tolkien's Invented World"

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cavalry of Rohan, no longer held in check by Saruman, and aided by the Wild Men of the woods, arrives unexpectedly out of the forest and Sauron's army is flanked and its commander killed (III, p. 117). Quickly following upon this action, the army is again flanked from the south by Aragorn, who has defeated the southern allies of Sauron on whom he had counted to cover that region and to aid in the siege. The battle is lost and most of Sauron's forces are destroyed (Bk 5, Ch. 6). The arrival of the Riders and Aragorn illustrates another vital principle of strategy: the essential nature of the timing of an attack. Sauron's attack on Minas Tirith had been expected and the defenders were ready for it, so there was no surprise involved. The attack of the Rohirrim and then of Aragorn, however, is a complete surprise and helps to dislocate and disorganize the besiegers. If the Riders had arrived later, after the fall of Minas Tirith, they could have done little against the victorious army of Sauron, but would probably have been annihilated.

Sauron's being caught off balance is a result of another of his failures as a strategist: his lack of any alternative moves to be made in case one of his plans is disrupted. To quote once more from Liddell Hart: "The absence of an alternative is contrary to the very nature of war. It sins against the light which Bourcet shed in the eighteenth century by his most penetrating dictum that 'every plan of campaign ought to have several branches and to have been so well thought out that one or the other of the said branches cannot fail of success.' ... A plan, like a tree, must have branches--if it is to bear fruit. A plan with a single aim is apt to prove a barren pole." (*Strategy*, pp. 343-44.) Sauron, however, had staked everything on the fall of Minas Tirith, and when this proves impossible, he is left again where he started.

Also, after this battle the opposing military forces are more equally balanced. Although the army that besieged Gondor was not the largest of the forces at Sauron's command, there can be no doubt that he has suffered a grievous loss which, coupled with the loss of his allies, has given a serious setback to his plans of conquest. Nevertheless, Sauron is still far from finished. He has a secure base from which to launch another attack and he has many troops that have not been used (III, p. 154). Now the decision rests with Gondor and its allies. Shall they remain on the defensive and wait for another attack, or take the offensive against Mordor? Once again Gandalf shows his ability as a master strategist. Like Napoleon, he realizes that "defensive war does not exclude attacking, just as offensive war does not exclude defending..." (Phillips, p. 437). The move which he proposes reveals that he has never for a moment lost sight of the fundamental maxim articulated by Liddell Hart: "...the true aim in war is the mind of the hostile rulers, not the bodies of their troops..." (*Strategy*, p. 219). He counsels an immediate attack—not in order to make a serious attempt to break into Mordor, which would in any case be impossible, but rather to keep Sauron distracted so that he will not notice the true threat to his power offered by Frodo and Sam. As he says, "We must push Sauron to his last throw. We must call out his hidden strength, so that he shall empty his land. We must march out to meet him at once. We must make ourselves the bait, though his jaws should close on us. He will take that bait, in hope and greed, for he will think that in such rashness he sees the pride of the new Ringlord..." (III, p. 156).

This move is a distraction, always an essential element in grand strategy. Liddell Hart defines distraction in the following terms: "Because of the risk that the enemy may achieve such a change of front, it is usually necessary for the dislocating move to be preceded by a move, or moves, which can best be defined by the term 'distract' in its literal sense of 'to draw asunder'. The purpose of this 'distraction' is to deprive the enemy of his freedom of action, and it should operate in both the physical and psychological spheres. ... 'Stonewall' Jackson aptly expresses this in his strategical motto—'Mystify, mislead, and surprise'. For to mystify and mislead constitutes 'distraction', while surprise is the essential cause of 'dislocation'. It is through the distraction of the commander's mind that distraction of his forces follows. The loss of his freedom of action is the sequel to the loss of his freedom of conception" (*Strategy*, pp. 341-42). The distraction succeeds, and Sauron completely fails to notice the true threat to his headquarters until it is too late and he is destroyed. Once the commander is gone, the remaining forces of Mordor cannot continue to operate in coordination and they are dealt with singly (Bk. 6, Ch. 4). There is a curious parallel to this attack and the type of attack envisioned by General J. F. C. Fuller after the First World War. In his words, "...new means of war... will force us to substitute a theory based on the idea of destroying command—not after the enemy's personnel has been disorganized, but when it is possible, before it has been attacked, so that it may be

found in a state of disorganization when attacked."<sup>19</sup>

*The Lord of the Rings* shows again that the art of war is truly an art, rather than a science. Strategy and military doctrine are not fixed elements that can be applied mechanically to produce a desired result. It might even be said that it was Sauron's belief that might alone must necessarily triumph that led to his downfall. Force is important and military power cannot be disregarded, but alone they are not always enough. It is in war, perhaps to a greater extent than in any other human activity, that the crucial element of success is a humane imagination. Last of all, one comes away from a consideration of the role of war in *The Lord of the Rings* with an increased respect for the achievement of the author. The outcome of the book is produced not by magic or simply by the author's fiat but through the natural development of the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing forces. This realism enables us to deal with the work as with a work of "true" history. In fact, with an artist like Tolkien, perhaps there is no distinction between "true" and "feigned" history.

### addendum

[Several of the members of the audience thought I had exaggerated in remarking on Sauron's "stupidity" and that actually he simply suffered from a run of "bad luck." After thinking it over, I am convinced that although Sauron is intelligent, his intelligence is severely limited by his inability to imagine what others might be like. His "bad luck" is mostly of his own making. Gandalf says of him, "Wise fool. For if he had used all his power to guard Mordor, so that none could enter, and bent all his guile to the hunting of the Ring, then indeed hope would have faded: neither Ring nor bearer could long have eluded him" (II, p. 100). Perhaps a definition of "stupidity" given by a former teacher of mine fits Sauron best: "Stupidity is aggressive ignorance." I am certain that Sauron's failure to question Pippin through the palantír must be classified as stupidity by anyone's definition. I agree with Auden: "One of Tolkien's most impressive achievements is that he succeeds in convincing the reader that the mistakes which Sauron makes to his own undoing are the kinds of mistake which Evil, however powerful, cannot help making, just because it is evil" (p. 7).]

<sup>19</sup> J. F. C. Fuller, *The Foundations of the Science of War* (London, Hutchinson and Co., 1926), p. 292.

## Footnotes from The Christian Character of Tolkien's Invented World by Willis D. Glover

((We apologize for having left these footnotes out of *Mythlore* 10, where the body of the article appeared on pages 3-8. —GG))

<sup>1</sup> "Tolkien on Tolkien," *Diplomat Magazine*, XVIII (October, 1966), 39.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Auden, "The Quest Hero," republished in *Tolkien and the Critics*, ed. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbaro. (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1968), p. 53.

Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*. Volume I of *Order and History* (Baton Rouge, 1956), 126-33.

The possibilities of parable are always present in a fairy story because of the necessary relationship between the real world and the secondary world of the story. Cf. J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (Boston, 1965), pp. 57, 59, 70-71.

<sup>3</sup> Historians of science since Pierre Duhem have made us aware of the relationship of the doctrine of creation to the origins of modern science. An interesting discussion of an aspect of the problem bearing closely on what is said here is Francis Oakley, "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science: The Rise of the Concept of the Laws of Nature," *Church History*, XXX (1961), 433-57. A convenient treatise on the Christian doctrine of creation and its relationship to both science and philosophy is Langdon Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth* (Garden City, N. Y., 1959); Gilkey's work suffers, however, from a lack of awareness of the importance of late medieval theology to his subject.

<sup>4</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1961), 178-79, 203-13, and passim.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Fuller, "The Lord of the Hobbits," *Tolkien and the Critics*, p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> Voegelin, *op. cit.*, 126-33 and passim.

<sup>7</sup> "Tolkien on Tolkien," *loc. cit.*, 39.