
Summer 7-15-1988

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Recommended Citation

Wytenbroek, J. R. (1988) "Apocalyptic Vision in *The Lord of the Rings*," *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature*: Vol. 14: No. 4, Article 2.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mythlore/vol14/iss4/2>

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Apocalyptic Vision in *The Lord of the Rings*

Abstract

Sees many parallels between events described in *Revelation* and those in *The Lord of the Rings*. In particular, sees Aragorn as a type of the Christ of the Apocalypse.

Additional Keywords

Apocalypse—Influence on *The Lord of the Rings*; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Aragorn—Christ-like qualities; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*

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Apocalyptic Vision in *The Lord of the Rings* J.R. Wytenbroek

The title of my paper is "Apocalyptic Vision in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*," and in it I shall refer to both the Christian view of the apocalypse, as presented primarily in the book of *Revelations*, and the Norse vision of Ragnarok, as presented in both the Prose and Elder Eddas. Both the Biblical and Norse visions of the last days of the world are very sketchy and open to much interpretation, the Norse Ragnarok being even less detailed and wide in scope than the Christian. Thus in discussing anyone's representation of the apocalypse, we need to be aware of the breadth of possibilities of reading and interpretation, and the almost endless potential for creating details and filling in the many vague, unclear, or apparently missing links and parts of both versions. I am going to argue that Tolkien took some of these allowable liberties with the little information he had before him, and that *The Lord of the Rings* presents a coherent and in some respects detailed schema for certain parts of the apocalyptic vision of both *Revelations* and the Eddas.

Firstly, however, I want to establish what I am not trying to do in this paper. I am not attempting to argue, in any way, that *The Lord of the Rings* is an allegory of the Christian and/or Norse vision of the apocalypse. Tolkien himself argued against *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory of any kind, and I emphatically agree with him. It is as work too great in scope and too profound in vision to be fitted into any one symbolic or allegorical system. However, it frequently contains elements and even visions of certain mythic or prophetic events. Consequently, some critics feel it is a history of the prelapsarian world, others, an alternative history to our own where Adam never fell. Some crit-

ics argue for Aragorn as the unfallen Adam, others for Frodo as an Adam about to fall but saved by grace at the last moment because of his compassion for Gollum throughout, and because he does not fall of his own free will. All these views have merit, and all enrich our understanding of the richness and profundity of this great epic work of one of the most important writers of the Twentieth Century.

Consequently I am not arguing that *The Lord of the Rings* is Tolkien's version of the apocalypse. That would be blatantly ridiculous and could be disproven on many counts. However I feel that part of his vision in *The Lord of the Rings* is decidedly apocalyptic in places, yet is not at all in conflict with prelapsarian or alternative history elements for which other critics have argued, and of which I see many instances. Tolkien's vision is broad enough to encompass all these different elements, and many others, and combine them into one amazingly coherent and harmonious whole.

Middle-earth is a world in decay, a dying world as Tolkien presents it for most of the Trilogy. There are pockets of beauty and peace, uncorrupted by Sauron or Saruman and their emissaries who delight in destroying all beautiful or living things. The Shire is still untouched when the romance begins. Sauron has not yet heard of it and also has not yet the power to stretch his arm so far. But his ignorance lasts only until the second chapter of the book, and from that time on the Shire is endangered. Other pockets of beauty and peace remain, primarily those occupied by powers with whom Sauron dares not tangle until his power is complete: Tom Bombadil's house in the Old For-

est, Rivendell, Lothlorien. Both Rohan and Gondor, although still beautiful, are no longer peaceful. Both show the ravages of recent and increasing conflict when we first see them, and Gondor, in particular, is decaying internally, through the weakening rule of the Stewards and its fall from greatness, precipitated by the end of the kingship there, many centuries before. Houses are empty, there are few children born in Gondor, and the weakness and laxness of attention of Gondor allowed Sauron to return to Mordor a few years before the events in this novel, when he captured the beautiful Tower of the Moon, Minas Ithil, turning it into the tower of Minas Morgul, the place of darkest terror in all of Middle-earth.

As decay and dissolution is one characteristic of the times of the apocalypse in both Norse and Biblical versions, another characteristic is apostasy. As Vernon Hyles (in his paper "The Hero and the World: Tolkien's Mythic Hero") says, "In Middle-earth, Boromir, Denethor and even Sauron represent this falling away from goodness" (p. 3). Apostasy is revealed clearly in Denethor's seduction by Sauron through his unwise use of the palantir, which is a blatant case of the seduction of the very elect prophesied for the last times in the Gospel of Mark (13:22). Saruman is not only seduced but, in many ways, becomes the symbol of the lesser evil figure of the apocalypse, the false prophet, who will rise to power shortly after the rise of Satan's emissary, the Beast (here symbolized by Sauron), in the battle against the people of the earth. Thus many of the figures present in the Biblical apocalypse are represented by their types in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Norse as well as other Biblical prophecies for this period appear directly in *The Lord of the Rings*. The sun, which is to go black according to *Revelations* and be swallowed by a wolf in Ragnarok, are mirrored in the darkened sky of Middle-earth where no sun appears for several days, and which is foretold by Gandalf to the anxious Pippin: "At sunrise I will take you to the Lord Denethor again. No, when the summons comes, not at sunrise. The Darkness has begun. There will be no dawn" (III, p. 38). Also the desolation of the earth through plague, famine, and war prophesied in *Revelations* has its counterpart in Ragnarok which, it is said, will be "An axe-age, a sword-age, shields will be cloven, a wind-age, a wolf-age, before the world's ruin" (p. 86). We see much evidence of the fierce fighting foretold in this prophecy from the *Elder Edda*. Furthermore, Tolkien has the company tracked and attacked by wargs, Sauron's wolves, before they enter the mines of Moria. This attack is prefigured in the double attack of the wargs in *The Hobbit*, particularly in the Battle of the Five Armies, which prefigures some of the some of the apocalyptic features of the war in *The Lord of the Rings*. In *Revelations*, similar troubles will be visited by God upon the earth to try to turn wicked men to repentance, although in *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron, Saruman and their forces bring the devastation of the land, the plague of the Black Breath, and war, prophesied in *Revelations* for the end-times, whereas in *Revelations* it is God who brings about the devastation.

War is foretold for both Ragnarok and the apocalypse. This war (Armageddon) is, of course, the direct conflict between the powers of good and the powers of evil. Important in both prophecies are men, who will be involved in this conflict and must choose sides. The heroes of Valhalla will ride with the Norse gods to battle, while in *Revelations* the army of heaven which does battle with the beast and the peoples of the earth whom he has seduced, may contain those faithful who have preceded the then living, in death. Humanity is called to choose its sides, in this great battle, although individual's choices may have been made ages before.

These choices appear in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Easterlings, Haradrim, Variags, and Southrons are seduced or cowed by Sauron into fighting on his side as the men of Dunland are by Saruman in the battle of Helm's Deep. The very scope of the battle is apocalyptic rather than simply a function of the necessary conflict between the hero and his adversary of romance, or even the larger battles between nations and races of legend and myth. It is a cosmic struggle that has world-wide implications, and has already been engaged in various ways from Bree to Gondor. The major battle takes place on the plains surrounding Gondor, in which the forces of good triumph, as they do at Armageddon. The last stand, however, takes place outside the gates of the enemy's stronghold. If the forces of good had failed at this time, then a bleak, Ragnarok-like ending would have been achieved. As Gandalf warned, months before, such a failure would allow the Enemy to "cover all the lands in a second darkness" (I, p. 57). But unlike Ragnarok, which is to end in defeat for the gods and heroes, and with the total destruction of the earth, the Christian Armageddon ends in victory for good, and here Tolkien draws more heavily on the Christian apocalyptic vision. The forces of evil are defeated at the last moment, and a time of peace, harmony, and justice is founded in Middle-earth.

To really examine the apocalyptic overtones of the climactic events presented in *The Return of the King*, we need to examine the primary characters involved. Central to the apocalyptic vision is Aragorn, warrior hero but king-in-exile for most of the romance. Aragorn's role has been examined and debated by many critics, and while most of them reveal very interesting things about his role and his character, two critics say the most, one through omission and the other, in my opinion, through error. The first, Ruth Noel, gives an excellent account of the heroic pattern inherent in Aragorn's story and role (in her book *The Mythology of Middle-earth*). She compares him primarily to King Arthur and Charlemagne in her study, pointing out the parallels between himself and the others in his role as warrior-hero, suffering hero, hero who must control the dead to prove his kingship, and king-healer. The other critic I referred to is William Ready who, in a delightfully insensitive series of statements in *The Tolkien Relation: A Personal Inquiry* says "Aragorn... is almost too good to be human, he has some of the qualities of the noble horse. Man needs more than a dash of pity to be his exciting self; a sharp taste for sin

must be in him too, if he is to be wholly vital" (p. 101). What sympathetic Noel misses and unsympathetic Ready pinpoints is that Aragorn in many ways is not, in fact, *only* a hero like Arthur and Charlemagne. He is definitely a symbol, possibly even a representative, of Christ, in his role of wandering exile, protector and guardian of the weak, fighter of evil and, of course, as king. Therefore Ready is essentially correct, although he lowers Aragorn to the level of a noble beast, missing the significance of his own statement that Aragorn is "almost too good to be human." As other critics have noticed (and have attributed to his Adamic qualities), Aragorn is essentially an unfallen or sinless character. He is capable of errors of judgement, as we see at Parth Galen, but he seems to have no evil in him. Yet he is not a wooden, two-dimensional character either. He knows deep personal sorrow and grief, and is able to experience and express anger when necessary. He can be moved to pity, compassion, tears, and laughter like any other man. He is a man whose emotions are noble and nobly expressed, but they are nonetheless real for that. His self-doubt, his anguish, and his joy are all convincingly and realistically conveyed, and while we cannot identify with him or respond to him the way we can with the hobbits, he is, nonetheless, a believable and truly human character.

But Aragorn is also "too good to be human." He may have been tempted by the Ring once and by his own desires once or twice (desires which are of the purest kind and highest order), but he never falls prey to temptation. He is courteous even to the love-stricken Eowyn, and her love, which he cannot return, grieves him rather than annoys or even flatters him. He is righteous in action and judgement, the latter particularly in evidence in the merciful justice he shows Beregon. He is motivated by the highest motives, and even his desires are proven to be righteous.

But much more than these examples indicate his Christ-role in the book. He is of purely royal descent. He is the only man in all Middle Earth who is closely bound the more supernatural of the races that dwell in Middle-earth: the High Elves and the Istari. Tolkien himself said of Aragorn that he "is not a pure 'Man,' but at long remove one of the 'children of Luthien'" (*Letters*, p. 200). He is brought up by the Elves and is the only man fully apprised of the lore and wisdom of these exiles of the paradisiac, immortal lands beyond the western seas. He also develops a deep friendship with one of the angelic Istari, Gandalf, who acts as his guide and mentor in the early years, and his fore-runner in later years. Aragorn symbolically dies by entering the gates of the Paths of the Dead, through which no man has passed alive. He leads his companions into the Paths of the Dead, and both they and the dead follow him out the other side because of the power of his will which, because their wills are given over to him, brings the human companions and Gímlí through the Paths of the Dead with their sanity and lives preserved. The dead hail him as their rightful lord to whom they owe obedience and service, and Christ's harrowing of hell is strongly suggested here.

To get a clearer picture of Aragorn as the apocalyptic Christ, let us look at the Biblical description of Christ as He enters the battle of Armageddon as depicted in *Revelations* 19:11-16:

And now I saw heaven open, and a white horse appear; its rider was called Faithful and True; he is a judge with integrity, a warrior for justice. His eyes were flames of fire, and his head was crowned with many coronets; the name written on him was known only to himself; his cloak was soaked in blood. He is known only to himself; his cloak was soaked in blood. He is known by the name, The Word of God. Behind him, dressed in linen of dazzling white, rode the armies of heaven on white horses. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike the pagans with; he is the one who will rule them with an iron sceptre, land tread out the wine of Almighty God's fierce anger. On his cloak and on his standard there was a name written: The King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Aragorn is presented, throughout the novel, as faithful and true, both to the cause of right and to his companions. His integrity is revealed many times before he is crowned king, while his justice is revealed primarily following his coronation. He goes to battle on the marches of Gondor, wise in leadership, great in battle, and victorious. His army is small and is pitted against the many forces of Mordor just as the army of heaven is pitted against "the beast, with all the kings of the earth and their armies" (*Revelations* 19:19). He bears the sharp and dangerous sword Anduril, Flame of the West, that has been reforged. He is the warrior-king who leads the forces of good against the enemy. As warrior-savior of his people, he wins the right to "rule the nations." Also he arrives at the gates of Gondor with a star on his brow, reminding us of the description of Christ in *Revelations* 22:16 as "the bright and morning star."

Following the battle, Aragorn gives further proof of his kingship by entering the Houses of Healing where Merry, Faramir, and Eowyn lie dying, deep in the thrall of the black breath of the chief Nazgul. Using the herb *athelas* to aid him, Aragorn actually travels into the soul of each, seeking the lost and wandering spirit and calling it back. "Now Aragorn knelt beside Faramir, and held a hand upon his brow. And those that watched felt that some great struggle was going on. For Aragorn's face grew grey with weariness; and ever and anon he called the name of Faramir, but each time more faintly to their hearing, as if Aragorn himself was removed from them, and walked afar in some dark vale, calling for one that was lost" (III, p. 124-25). Here again Aragorn enters the realms of death, this time its borderlands and, having once already proven himself lord of the dead, he now restores the dying from death to life. "The hands of the king are the hands of a healer" says the old wife Ioreth (III, p. 120), echoing *Malachi* 4:2 in the Old Testament which says "But unto you that fear my name shall the Son of righteousness arise with

healing in his wings..." And echoes of this scripture, along with the reference to God as the Ancient of Days in *Daniel* 7:22 and in *Job* 12:30 as possessing wisdom and strength, are even more strongly woven through the distinctly messianic description of Aragorn at his coronation (III, p. 217):

But when Aragorn arose all that beheld him gazed in silence, for it seemed to them that he was revealed to them now for the first time. Tall as the sea-kings of old, he stood above all that were near; ancient of days he seemed and yet in the flower of manhood; and wisdom sat on his brow, and strength and healing were in his hands, and a light was about him. And then Faramir cried:

"Behold the King!"

Aragorn has paralleled Christ's wandering exile, his suffering, his voyage into death, the harrowing of hell, and the return into life. However, there is no break in Aragorn's story. He moves from the echoes of the first incarnation straight into those of Christ's return to earth. The title of the third book of the Trilogy is, of course, *The Return of the King*, easily read as an alternative wording to "the second coming of Christ." It is first in this book that Aragorn truly assumes his role as leader of the warriors in war and ruler of the people in peace.

The Armageddon of *Revelations* is followed not by the destruction and remaking of the world, but rather by the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. During his first incarnation, Christ wandered, an exile from his true Homeland, rootless with "nowhere to lay his head" (*Matthew* 8:50). He came, the first time, as servant, not as leader, ruler and king. His entire ministry on earth consisted of serving, teaching, and nurturing those who sought him out. It is not until his second coming, and after the battle of Armageddon, that he will take his place as king of the world. He is both servant and king, exile and ruler of all. So too is Aragorn. Aragorn spends most of the first two books of the Trilogy serving others. First he serves Frodo and his friends. He continues to serve only as advisor and protector for the fellowship until Gandalf falls in Moria. Even then he assumes his leadership reluctantly, seeking help from Galadriel and Celeborn in Lothlorien. Once the Fellowship is broken, he serves again, setting aside his own true and right desire to hurry to the aid of Gondor, choosing instead a lower service by following the captured hobbits Merry and Pippin, in the hope of saving their lives. When Gandalf returns, Aragorn joyfully sets aside his assumed leadership, and follows the wizard on to Rohan, where he continues to serve at Helm's Deep, under the leadership of Theoden.

It is not until he uses the palantir to confront Sauron face to face that Aragorn begins to take on his role as leader and king-to-be. In revealing himself to Sauron, the lines between the two enemies are drawn. For it is Sauron and Aragorn who are in most direct conflict with each other, not

Sauron and Gandalf or even Sauron and Frodo. Sauron is the usurper --he is forcing himself, through seduction, fear, and force upon the people of Middle-earth, even as does the Beast in *Revelations*. Gandalf certainly has no claims to kingship or rulership of any kind in Middle-earth, and in fact rejects just such a suggestion from Saruman, in his early confrontation with the newly-enrobed Saruman of Many Colors. Therefore although Gandalf and the other Istari are the closest beings to the supernatural that there is in Middle Earth (Tolkien has said that they are angels --*Letters*, p. 202), he is not the one in direct competition with Sauron for the rulership of Middle Earth. Sauron is the false king, attempting to take the place, as does the Beast, of the true King. Of course Sauron, unlike the Beast, does not know that a true king still walks the earth, and thus Aragorn essentially assumes his role as leader and king, when he reveals who he is to Sauron.

Thus Aragorn remains servant until the time is exactly right for him to reveal himself as king. For Christ, the period between his ascension and second coming fill the gap between his role as server and his role as king. Although Aragorn essentially steps into his kingship with his confrontation of Sauron and his conquering of the dead, even as Christ did after his death and the harrowing of hell, neither come into their kingship until after the enemy is defeated. Aragorn does battle and is victorious, but the war is not yet won. He assumes anonymity after the battle and does not enter the city of Gondor as king but again serves, this time in the Houses of Healing, albeit revealing his kingship through his healing hands. But the time when he can reveal himself in all his royalty and majesty comes only after Sauron is defeated.

Aragorn himself is not the direct agent of Sauron's defeat, and this departure from the Biblical text is important to ensure that this part of *The Lord of the Rings* does not simply become a retelling with added detail of the Biblical prophecy. Aragorn has been, throughout, somewhat dependent on others to play their own essential roles in the correct resolution to the crisis facing Middle-earth. He is warrior-king, but he is not an isolated hero. But then, neither is the Christ of *Revelations*, nor the gods of Ragnarok. The gods are accompanied by the heroes of Valhalla, each one having his part in the battle. Christ was solitary and independent of others in his first incarnation. However, he is surrounded by saints and the heavenly hosts all through *Revelations*, and never once appears on his own, after the opening chapter. Again the parallels are striking. For 38 years Aragorn walked the wilds of Middle-earth alone, fighting where and with whom he would, coming and going even in Rohan and Gondor as he felt necessary, having no companions upon whom he relied, and having no real home anywhere, unless it was Rivendell, which was denied him until he had proven himself. For the resolution of the great crisis of the end of the age, however, Aragorn becomes a member of a company, first with the hobbits at Bree and then as one of the Nine Walkers. He is no longer isolated and independent. He is a member of the greater company that aids in the defeat of Sauron, and he is leader of part of the greater company at the

end. But he does not defeat Sauron alone, and he risks almost certain death, as does his army, in the heroic confrontation of good against evil before the gates of Mordor. There may be no risk of defeat for the armies of heaven that battle the Beast and his armies, but the heavenly leader is given little prominence in the description of Armageddon. His prominence, the scripture suggests, is to come after the battle, when he is crowned "ruler of nations."

Sauron and the Beast are defeated. On earth, Christ takes up his role as king and is allotted a limited time to reign there -- 1000 years. Here again we find a parallel. Aragorn, described at his coronation with much messianic imagery, becomes the just and righteous king of all of Middle-earth. He brings with him all the promise of the millennium stated in other parts of scripture, such as the closing chapters of *Isaiah*: he rules with justice and wisdom, bringing peace, harmony and virtue. According to William Dowie (in "The Gospel of Middle-earth according to J.R.R. Tolkien"), Faramir's immediate recognition of Aragorn as king expresses "the great yearning of the people of the West -- consonant with the Christian vision of man fulfilled only through dependence and humility" (p. 280). He continues: "As Gerardus van der Leeuw observes: 'Since kingly potency is no personal capacity, all conceivable salvation is expected of it. The king's powers ought to overflow.... As a genuine saviour the king also heals.' ... The institution of kingship signifies, indeed, a forcible and thorough change in human life: everything was waste and misery, but now all is well. Once again the breath of Spring is wafted..." (p. 280).

As suggested in Dowie's last statement, there is rebirth and renewal under Aragorn's rule, as there is to be under Christ's. Evil is subdued, the waste places bloom anew, lives are restored, and even the White Tree of Gondor is reborn, symbolic of the Tree of Life of the Christian tradition that is to grow in the center of the new Jerusalem, as the White Tree grows in the center of Gondor, the King's city. It also suggests the ash Tree Yggdrasil, the tree of life of the Norse myths. Indeed, throughout the romance Aragorn helps sustain life -- first in the North where he and his fellow Rangers roam, then at the end in the South. Aragorn as healer not only gives new life to dying individuals, but as healer-king also renews the life of the dying city and the whole realm of Middle-earth. Fertility follows devastation as the land flourishes; Gondor is renewed with the return of the women and children, and the rapid repopling of the once half-empty city. Beauty and grace are restored to the city of the king as dwarves and elves work together to make it more beautiful and mighty than ever before. Therefore not only is the evil undone and old restored, but the old is actually renewed, made better, strengthened and beautified far beyond its previous strength and beauty. Middle-earth, from the Shire almost to the gates of Mordor itself, is renewed and blossoms under the kingship of Aragorn. It is the prelapsarian world restored, as Christianity believes will happen to our own world during the millennium. The final parallel here with the millennium is that Aragorn reigns for just over a hundred years, only a tenth of a millennial

reign but the closest approximation that would fit the story, and still an extremely long time for a mortal. But this fact, like Aragorn's death, falls outside the story proper, and when we leave Gondor for the last time in the book, the king's reign is just beginning and time stretches ahead unhindered by the closing pages of the romance.

With the ending of the Third Age, there is loss. The high elves leave Middle-earth, as do the Istari, the wizards. But once again, in Aragorn much is retained that would otherwise be completely lost. He has elf-blood in his own veins. He was brought up in the house of Elrond, and knows the histories of both the men of the Westernesee and the High Elves since the beginning of time. With his marriage to Arwen Evenstar, he brings a final unity to the two great races of Middle-earth, the Elves and the men of Numenor. His friendship with Gandalf has prepared him for his role as king, and therefore he carries, metaphorically, the spirit of Gandalf with him when he rules. The best of that which is Other, in Middle-earth, therefore, in many senses comes into a unified oneness in the person of Aragorn and therefore the loss of the special peoples of the earth at the end of the Third Age enriches the men of the Fourth, so that they may become more than they were before all things were unified in one man. The messianic concept of the unity of all peoples in Christ is suggested here. In Aragorn, then, all elements of the supernatural present in Middle Earth and the human come together. He is both son of God and son of man, truly a reflection of Christ.

Furthermore, the marriage of Aragorn and Arwen Evenstar is significant. He struggles to achieve his kingship, and in doing so helps save Middle-earth. She is part of all that he has struggled for and saved, and in this role she can be seen, at the end of the novel only, as symbolizing that beautiful bride of Christ, the church, dressed in shining white, who is being prepared for him after his victory over the powers of evil. The suggestion is presented more faintly, perhaps, than many of the other symbols and parallels, but is nonetheless present. This idea is strengthened if the unity of all things and peoples in Christ is recognized also in Aragorn. His marriage to Arwen crystallizes the drawing together of the two great races, the foremost created directly by the creator at the beginning of the *Silmarillion*. Here at the end of the long ages of the elves' story is the unification of man and elf into a more majestic, fuller whole than man had or could have been before.

The final test of Aragorn's Christlike kingship is shown in three places in particular. The first occurs on the Paths of the Dead, where his will alone draws his living companions through and preserves them from madness. However the Dunedain and Gimli (Legolas alone is unafraid), despite their own terror, follow him freely into the Paths of the Dead, *because they love him*. Their love of him overcomes their fear, and inspires them to follow him into figurative death. This same love is revealed by Faramir when Aragorn calls him back from the very borders of death. Perhaps the greatest and most moving proclamation of fealty

and love in a book so full of love and loyalty is presented in this scene: "Suddenly Faramir stirred, and he opened his eyes, and looked on Aragorn who bent over him; and a light of knowledge and love was kindled in his eyes, and he spoke softly. 'My lord, you called me. I come. What does the king command?'" (III, p. 216). Finally the people, who have seen their king mighty in battle on their behalf and know him also as healer and savior, assent joyously to his coronation: "Shall he be king and enter into the city and dwell there? And all the host and all the people cried *yes* with one voice" (III, p. 216). It is with just such a deep love and joy in him, that the people of God are to welcome the coming again of their king, and to dedicate their lives to his service, following him even into death if need be, in the meantime. The deep and intense love that Aragorn inspires is a true test not only of his right to his kingdom, but of his Christ role in the final events of this romance.

There are, of course, other major characters who have an important role in the apocalyptic events of the final book. Gandalf is very important, and many critics have argued for him as a type of Christ throughout the romance, an argument I in no way wish to disagree with, in essence. However, one critic argues that Gandalf's role is that of the Holy Spirit in many respects, and this reading fits in well with Tolkien's apocalyptic elements in the book. Gandalf is companion and advisor to Aragorn. He also prepares the hearts of those in Middle Earth who can still stand against evil, and prepares the way for Aragorn's coming as king, in many ways. These are all attributes associated with the Holy Spirit, and he is particularly important in that role in *The Return of the King*.

The hobbits are also important, particularly Frodo. Again there has been a great deal said about Frodo as a type of Christ, and although that is certainly part of his role, I feel that it is perhaps less than is argued by some. Concerning their apocalyptic role, the hobbits are more types of everyman choosing between good and evil. Frodo is a "man" figure who chooses to fight evil as best he can, and he is purified and made holy by suffering, compassion, and his unwavering intention, from chapter two until the end of the romance, for good. However, he would have failed his quest because, of himself, he is not strong enough to stand against the mighty evil of the ring of his own free will at the end, if it were not for the grace given him, through the unlikely vehicle of Gollum. Therefore although he certainly has some Christ characteristics, he does not succeed in his quest in himself as no man can, in the Christian world view. Therefore he is more an Adam figure, saved by grace from the fall, rather than a Christ figure. Furthermore, he is never destined to become a leader or a king. He is the representative of the ordinary Christian in his role in the apocalypse, particularly evident in *The Return of the King*. His quest is the process by which he is made worthy of his calling and is made Christlike. Sam, Pippin, and Merry are also human representatives, revealing the part small but significant humanity can play in the battle between those greater in power and supernatural stature than themselves.

I have traced Tolkien's vision of the apocalypse very sketchily in this paper. Much more could be said about the role of the hobbits and Gandalf. Many more apocalyptic images, symbols, and parallels could be traced, not only through *The Lord of the Rings*, but also through *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion*, and some of the other writings which are still appearing. Ruth Noel has said that Tolkien's works are largely concerned with the denial (or transcendence) of death (p. 26-7). I believe that this statement not only includes the death of the individual, but can be extended to the larger death awaited by the Christians: the death of life as we have known it on earth, and, at the very end, the death of earth itself. The dying of an age is chronicled in a cosmic manner in *The Lord of the Rings*. But like the scriptural apocalypse, Tolkien does not stop with death. He shows a world reborn, a new age of peace and justice and harmony established. He shows that life must always follow death, even on the cosmic scale. This is the hope of the Christian, and this is the informing hope of this romance built upon Tolkien's own essential Christian vision.

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