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The splintered fragment

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

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Introduction

Nearly twenty years have now passed since critic Philip Toynbee confidently but mistakenly assured readers of the London Observer that The Lord of the Rings would soon be passing into "merciful oblivion."[1] The subsequent success these books have enjoyed has proven this prediction wholly unfounded. Far from fading into oblivion, The Lord of the Rings has found a very receptive audience among readers and critics of widely varying literary tastes, and while it is obviously too soon to suggest that the popularity it has enjoyed and the genius it displays will assure Tolkien a place among other great English writers like Chaucer and Milton, it seems certain that Tolkien will never fade into oblivion as Toynbee predicted in the summer of 1961. What seems equally certain is that this popularity will continue to grow as readers and critics read The Silmarillion, the collection of mythological tales about the earliest ages of Middle-Earth history, which forms the background for The Lord of the Rings.

This suggestion about the effect of The Silmarillion should not, however, obscure an even more important fact--the publication of this long-awaited work, published after Tolkien's death but prepared and edited under his direction by his son Christopher, along with the publication of the authorized biography of Tolkien by Humphrey Carpenter, marks a significant turning point for the study of Tolkien, perhaps more significant than the publication of The Lord of the Rings itself. There are two reasons for saying this. First of all, readers now have the complete works

of Tolkien, and, therefore, the conclusions they draw about Middle-Earth after studying both works together as Tolkien intended will be based, for the first time, on all his works rather than upon The Lord of the Rings alone.[2] What can be forgotten too readily is the limitation imposed on past readers and critics who were unable to read The Silmarillion; since their ideas about Middle-Earth have been based on the trilogy alone, these ideas have been by necessity incomplete and somewhat speculative. Readers today, therefore, have an advantage because this completed canon of works will remain essentially unchanged even though there are other letters and writings about Middle-Earth which one cannot presently obtain for research purposes because they have not been published yet. But while they remain unpublished, their contents have been sufficiently discussed by Carpenter, and what he reveals indicates that their future publication will not radically alter or challenge the conclusions that one is now able to form about Tolkien's mythology. The fact that both works can be read and studied together leads to the second reason why this publication is so significant. It allows one to explore and develop two areas in particular in Tolkien studies which critics have either left undeveloped or been unable to develop adequately without The Silmarillion. Since Tolkien spoke about both of these areas, he presumably considered them important for understanding his purpose and meaning.

The first area that deserves attention concerns the unity of The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings. Despite Tolkien's insistence about the unity of these two works and his hope that no criticism be written until the former work was published, critics have gone ahead to produce a large body of criticism about The Lord of the Rings, books as well as articles, that ignores this important point.[3] Not only has

The Lord of the Rings been discussed and analyzed without reference to the central stories of The Silmarillion, but it has been popularly, though erroneously, described as a sequel to The Hobbit despite the fact that Tolkien himself considered it a sequel to The Silmarillion as early as 1939, some ten years before he even completed a rough draft of The Lord of the Rings.[4] Still another indication that critics have ignored this point is the fact that very few books but the most recent even mention the existence of The Silmarillion. Anyone reading this criticism might naturally conclude that Tolkien's crowning achievement and life's work was The Lord of the Rings while The Silmarillion was less important to him. Yet the biography shows how false this impression is. Though he once told his publisher, Sir Stanley Unwin, that The Silmarillion was his "private, beloved nonsense," he also considered it his "real work," and it was to this "real work," begun more than forty years before, that he returned after he retired from his Merton Professorship of English Language and Literature at Oxford in 1959. Even at this late date, he planned to revise and complete the work.[5]

The second area which deserves more attention now that The Silmarillion has been published is the influence of Roman Catholicism upon the mythology of Middle-Earth, an influence that Tolkien spoke about on more than one occasion. Related closely to this is the influence of the Scriptures, primarily the Old and New Testament readings which Tolkien heard throughout his life when he attended Mass. Numerous critics have recognized an element of Providence in The Lord of the Rings, but how this is specifically Catholic has not been carefully examined; furthermore, without The Silmarillion, they have been unable to understand its significance as the key unifying element that binds the works together; neither have they been

able to understand that this providential plan has its beginnings in the remote ages of The Silmarillion and its end in a future beyond The Lord of the Rings.

At the risk of generalizing one can suggest that these two areas have remained unexplored and undeveloped simply because critics have not been content to wait for the publication of The Silmarillion as Tolkien had hoped; rather, in their haste, they have written, sometimes inadequately, on the only work available and thus have been unable to grasp the totality of Tolkien's mythological world. One might describe this situation by using a metaphor which Tolkien himself used when he criticized the methods of early critics of Beowulf. In his well-known address, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," delivered to the British Academy on November 25, 1936, he compared these critics to short-sighted men who had inadvertently but irreparably destroyed a tower so that they could examine more closely the stones out of which the tower had been built; ironically, since they never troubled to climb the tower before tearing it down, they never realized that from the top of the tower they could have seen the sea.[6] Tolkien critics, to borrow his metaphor, have not even waited for the tower to be completed before making conclusions about its meaning.

While it would be presumptuous to claim that Tolkien will be fully understood once one has explored and developed both of these areas, the unity of his work and its Catholicity, it is not presumptuous to suggest that any interpretation claiming to be complete must take account of the questions raised by these two particular areas. Once this is done, it may become clearer why Tolkien does deserve a place among great writers like Chaucer and Milton.

Chapter I

The Unity and Catholicity of Tolkien's Mythology

Now that The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings can be read together, the basic starting point of any interpretation of the world and the mythology they present must begin with Tolkien's own insistence about the fundamental unity of these two works. While it is true that each work is an independent whole that can be read with great enjoyment and understanding by itself, a fact that Tolkien himself admitted, it is a mistake either to regard The Silmarillion as mere background for The Lord of the Rings, only useful for explaining obscure references in the trilogy, or to conclude that the books have separate, unrelated plots.[7] That Tolkien thought the books formed a unified whole is evident if one carefully examines two kinds of evidence which support this hypothesis--evidence from studying the evolution of The Silmarillion and the negotiations preceding the publication of The Lord of the Rings and evidence from the text of The Lord of the Rings itself. Such a study makes one realize that The Silmarillion, though it lay unrevised and unfinished at Tolkien's death, nevertheless forms the background out of which emerged his other, much longer tale about Middle-Earth, The Lord of the Rings; hence, this latter tale, though a self-contained story, is but part of a much more complex "story," and that "story," as it is told in the tales of The Silmarillion, Tolkien began working on in 1917, more than twenty years before he even conceived of writing the work that he would come to call The Lord of the Rings.

What would eventually be entitled The Silmarillion was begun in early 1917 as "The Book of Lost Tales" while Tolkien was on leave from the Western Front recovering from trench fever, which he had caught in October 1916, and was finished, in rough form, by the time he and his family visited his brother Hilary sometime after May 1923. It was during this interval, while first recuperating in the hospital, then teaching at Oxford and Leeds Universities, that he wrote the major tales of a mythology that would remain basically the same at his death more than fifty years later. According to Carpenter, the only thing these "lost tales" lacked after May 1923 was a clear ending, but this was to be supplied by the story of a character named Earendel, a hero who is transformed into a star.

> "The Book of Lost Tales" was almost complete. At Oxford and at Leeds Tolkien had composed the stories that tell of the creation of the universe, the fashioning of the Silmarils, and their theft from the blessed realm of Valinor by Morgoth. The cycle still lacked a clear ending--it was to conclude with the voyage of Earendel's star-ship that had been the first element of the mythology to arise in Tolkien's mind--and some of the stories were only in synopsis; but a little more effort would bring the work to a conclusion.[8]

Later renamed Eärendil, Earendel is perhaps the most significant character of Tolkien's mythology because his creation marks what Carpenter calls "the beginning of Tolkien's own mythology."[9] That beginning dates to the summer of 1914 when Tolkien wrote a poem entitled "The Voyage of Earendel the Evening Star," a poem inspired by his enthusiasm for the opening two lines of the Anglo-Saxon Crist of Cynewulf, which he had read sometime after he decided to study English rather than Classics at the beginning of a summer term in school in 1913. In 1915 he had expanded these verses into a longer story called "The Lay of Earendel"; by early 1917, when he

came to write "The Fall of Gondolin," the first story of his "Book of Lost Tales," Earendel had evolved to become the grandson of the king of an elvish city who escapes, with a handful of survivors, from the dying city of Gondolin as it is being destroyed by Morgoth, the ancient enemy of Elves and Men of Middle-Earth.

Two other stories of importance were also written in 1917. In August Tolkien finished "The Children of Húrin," a story about a doomed hero, a mortal known as Túrin, who slays a dragon but who eventually commits suicide. More important, however, is the story that he wrote after the birth of his first son, John, in November of that year, the story of Beren the mortal and Lúthien the immortal elven-maid who steal a Silmaril from the crown of Morgoth. The story of their love and quest, what Carpenter says "was to be the centre of The Silmarillion," Tolkien loved the most himself.[10] How much the story meant to him personally is indicated by the fact that he had these names engraved on his and Edith's tombstones.

Although "The Book of Lost Tales" was almost complete by the summer of 1923, Tolkien did not press on to finish it in order to publish it; instead he began revising and turned two of the early stories--the story of Túrin and that of Beren and Lúthien--into verse. In 1926 he sent these and other poems to R.W. Reynolds, who had taught him English literature; sometime later, he also sent a copy of the Beren poem, "The Gest of Beren and Lúthien," to C.S. Lewis, whom he had met for the first time in May of the same year. While Reynolds gave only "lukewarm praise" for these two major poems, C.S. Lewis, probably because he shared Tolkien's interest and enthusiasm for northern mythological subjects, praised the Beren poem.[11]

Perhaps this encouragement from Lewis explains why Tolkien continued working on the poems, even though he never did complete them, until the

Túrin poem ran to some two thousand lines while the Beren poem, renamed "The Lay of Leithian," ran to some four thousand.

Such encouragement for these poems and for the portions of The Silmarillion that Tolkien read aloud for Lewis during the 1930's did not, however, move Tolkien to finish writing the work. Apparently he was satisfied with merely telling the stories to a very select few. He had, it is true, entertained the Essay Club at Exeter College with a reading of "The Fall of Gondolin" before he began teaching at Leeds University in 1920, but this was an exception because, outside of C.S. Lewis, few even knew of the existence of "The Book of Lost Tales." The only other persons Tolkien told these stories to were his own children, especially Christopher; during the early 1930's his father told him the stories about Beren and Lúthien and their quest to the stronghold of Morgoth. It was this practice of storytelling that led indirectly, however, to Tolkien's first attempt to publish The Silmarillion, for it was in the early 1930's that Tolkien began a different story that would evolve into The Hobbit. Because of the success that this work enjoyed, Sir Stanley Unwin of the Allen and Unwin publishing firm asked Tolkien for other writing about hobbits, and Tolkien sent, along with other short stories, the large body of manuscripts of "The Book of Lost Tales." Perhaps Tolkien was not surprised to find that Unwin soon decided that this somewhat disorganized work was unsuitable as a sequel to The Hobbit; nevertheless its apparent rejection led him subsequently to turn away from Allen and Unwin.

In the autumn of 1949 when he had finally finished The Lord of the Rings, therefore, he wanted it published, but he did not want Allen and Unwin to publish it, having come to feel, wrongly according to Carpenter, that Unwin had rejected The Silmarillion.[12] However, Tolkien felt that

turning away from Allen and Unwin would not harm his chances of finally seeing the work published. Some time before he had met Milton Waldman, a representative of the Collins publishing firm, and Waldman, after reading the unfinished, unrevised Silmarillion, gave him assurances that Collins would publish it if Tolkien could finish it. The only qualification was that Tolkien have no moral or legal commitments to Allen and Unwin; since Tolkien felt that he had neither, the arrangement with Collins looked promising.

Tolkien's correspondence is important here for proving that now he wanted both works published together. He wrote to Allen and Unwin in February 1950 saying he had finished The Lord of the Rings but discouraging their publishing it.

> My work has escaped from my control, and I have produced a monster: an immensely long, complex, rather bitter, and rather terrifying romance, quite unfit for children (if fit for anybody); and it is not really a sequel to The Hobbit, but to The Silmarillion. Ridiculous and tiresome as you may think me, I want to publish them both--The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings. That is what I should like. Or I shall let it all be. I cannot contemplate any drastic re-writing or compression. But I shall not have any just grievance (nor shall I be dreadfully surprised) if you decline so obviously unprofitable a proposition.[13]

To Stanley Unwin's reply to this letter asking whether the works could be split into three or four volumes, Tolkien gave a decisive "No," maintaining that the only natural division was between the two works themselves. After learning that Rayner Unwin, Sir Stanley's son, later suggested that The Lord of the Rings be published but The Silmarillion dropped after a second look, a suggestion that made Tolkien "furious," Tolkien gave Stanley Unwin an ultimatum. On April 17 Unwin replied and declined to publish the works.[14]

Shortly afterwards in May 1950, Tolkien was dismayed when Waldman visited him at Oxford and told him that The Lord of the Rings had to be cut. Tolkien said he would try. What seemed a promising arrangement began to drag. Because Waldman was in Italy and Collins knew little about Tolkien's books, the arrangement had produced nothing by late 1951, over a year later. Tolkien then wrote Waldman a long letter of some ten thousand words, a letter that has yet to be published, outlining his entire mythology to convince him that "the books were interdependent and indivisible."[15] Sometime in March 1952 Tolkien had become so frustrated that he wrote to Collins and gave him an ultimatum. Because the price of paper had risen, Collins backed out. Thus it was that Tolkien turned back to Allen and Unwin and wrote to Rayner Unwin on June 22, 1952.

> As for The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion, they are where they were. The one finished, the other still unfinished (or unrevised), and both gathering dust. Better something than nothing! Although to me all are one, and The Lord of the Rings would be better far (and eased) as part of the whole, I would gladly consider the publication of any part of the stuff. Years are becoming precious. What about The Lord of the Rings? Can anything be done about that, to unlock the gates I slammed myself?[16]

That Tolkien considered The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings one work, then, seems proven once one becomes familiar with the evolution of both works and their relationship with each other chronologically. Unfortunately, one cannot presently obtain the one letter which would explain precisely why Tolkien considered them unified--the letter which he wrote to Waldman in late 1951. Neither is it possible to study the revisions which Tolkien later made to The Silmarillion in the light of The Lord of the Rings so that both works harmonized in every detail. Carpenter merely says that Tolkien had begun to make progress on this problem by the summer of 1971. Despite these qualifications, however, one can still

conclude that the first step toward understanding Tolkien is to stress the unity of these two works.

Further proof for this suggestion is found in the text of the trilogy itself. Besides the many references to the "Elder Days," a phrase that recalls that ancient past during which occur the events of The Silmarillion, Tolkien also alludes to the principal characters of that past such as Beren and Eärendil. While these references and allusions remind the reader how old Middle-Earth actually is and that it has already witnessed the rise and fall of many kingdoms by the time of the War of the Ring in the closing years of the Third Age, that is not their main purpose. More importantly, they suggest that the characters of this later age are pitted in a life-and-death struggle against the very same evil force that brought about the destruction of the once-flourishing kingdoms of the Noldorian and Sindarian elves in Beleriand, an area of Middle-Earth west of Hobbiton which was buried by the sea before the beginning of the Third Age. That evil force is not Sauron the Dark Lord, but Sauron's master, Melkor or Morgoth Bauglir, the Great Enemy of Elves and Men.

Once one reads the trilogy from this perspective, remembering that it was written long after the major stories of Tolkien's mythology had already taken shape, the significance of these allusions becomes apparent. Frodo and Sam, for example, are compared to the greatest mortal heroes of the Three Houses of Men, or Edain, who fought against Morgoth in the First Age. At the Council of Elrond, after the hobbit Frodo has volunteered to take the One Ruling Ring to Mordor himself, Elrond tells him that such courage places him among "all the mighty elf-friends of old, Hador, and Húrin, and Túrin, and Beren himself. . ." (I, 355).[17] Similarly, when Sam, Frodo's companion, fights alone against Shelob, the monstrous

spider, his struggle is as valiant as would have been either Túrin's or Beren's (II, 429). Tolkien's method here is not unlike that of the Beowulf poet, for just as one will better understand why the poet compares Beowulf to earlier Germanic heroes like Siegmund if he knows the story of Siegmund, so one will better understand the significance of these associations if one knows the central stories of The Silmarillion. Sam, though he is presented as a character more content with simple things in life like his gardening rather than with great heroic deeds, realizes that the quest to destroy the Ring is linked to this past. On the Stairs of Cirith Ungol he tells Frodo that they live within the midst of a great tale:

> Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours. But that's a long tale, of course, and goes on past the happiness and into grief and beyond it--and the Silmaril went on and came to Eärendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got--you've got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end? (II, 408)

The earliest and most important reference to the stories of The Silmarillion is given by a character who is literally linked to this ancient past--Aragorn, the Ranger, revealed to be the true heir to the throne of Gondor, who descends in direct, unbroken line from the Kings of Númenor, whose first King, Elros, son of Eärendil, is the great-grandson of Beren the mortal. As Aragorn and the hobbits huddle together for warmth and protection on Weathertop, fearing imminent attack from the Ringwraiths who have been tracking them for days, Aragorn tells them stories about the "Elder Days." Because he does not wish to speak of Sauron, he tells them instead the story of Beren and Lúthien. When he

finishes, he speaks about its significance:

> It tells of the meeting of Beren son of Barahir and Lúthien Tinúviel. Beren was a mortal man, but Lúthien was the daughter of Thingol, a King of Elves upon Middle-Earth when the world was young; and she was the fairest maiden that has ever been among all the children of this world. As the stars above the mists of the Northern lands was her loveliness, and in her face was a shining light. In those days the Great Enemy, of whom Sauron of Mordor was but a servant, dwelt in Angband in the North, and the Elves of the West coming back to Middle-Earth made war upon him to regain the Silmarils which he had stolen; and the fathers of Men aided the Elves. But the Enemy was victorious and Barahir was slain, and Beren escaping through great peril came over the Mountains of Terror into the hidden Kingdom of Thingol in the forest of Neldoreth. There he beheld Lúthien singing and dancing in a glade beside the enchanted river Esgalduin; and he named her Tinúviel, that is Nightingale in the language of old. Many sorrows befell them afterwards, and they were parted long. Tinúviel rescued Beren from the dungeons of Sauron, and together they passed through great dangers, and cast down even the Great Enemy from his throne, and took from his iron crown one of the three Silmarils, brightest of all jewels, to be the bride-piece of Lúthien to Thingol her father. Yet at last Beren was slain by the Wolf that came from the gates of Angband, and he died in the arms of Tinúviel. But she chose mortality, and to die from the world, so that she might follow him; and it is sung that they met again beyond the Sundering Seas, and after a brief time walking alive once more in the green woods, together they passed, long ago, beyond the confines of this world. So it is that Lúthien Tinúviel alone of the Elf-kindred has died indeed and left the world, and they have lost her whom they most loved. But from her the lineage of the Elf-lords of old descended among Men. There live still those of whom Lúthien was the foremother, and it is said that her line shall never fail. Elrond of Rivendell is of that Kin. For of Beren and Lúthien was born Dior Thingol's heir; and of him Elwing the White whom Eärendil wedded, he that sailed his ship out of the mists of the world into the seas of heaven with the Silmaril upon his brow. And of Eärendil came the Kings of Númenor, that is Westernesse. (I, 260-61)

Beren and Eärendil, the Great Enemy and the Silmarils--these allusions are a reminder that the events of The Lord of the Rings, ancient as they are, are indissolubly linked to a conflict in a yet more ancient past--the conflict between good and evil that dates, not from the reappearance of Sauron in the Third Age, but from an event before the very beginnings

of Middle-Earth history itself--the sin and damnation of the angelic-like Vala known as Melkor. Herein lies the key to the unity of these works.

Put very simply, what unifies these works is the centuries-long conflict between good and evil that is fought over a vast breadth of time. Begun shortly after the Creation of the World and lasting until the End of the World, this conflict, the great tale Sam speaks about, involves two divine Beings, Ilúvatar the Creator and Melkor the Vala, who, like Satan, rebels against his Creator. In their ensuing conflict over the "dominion" of Creation, all creatures of Middle-Earth in all ages are involved, either for or against Melkor and his emissaries. Hence, the wars which are repeatedly waged through the three ages of Middle-Earth are rooted in this original conflict. Even the defeat of Sauron, Melkor's chief emissary, at the end of the Third Age does not mark the end of this conflict; this is proven by the existence of Tolkien's unpublished typescript, "The New Shadow," an unfinished story about the rise of evil in the Fourth Age. Under the guidance of Melkor, evil, like a hidden seed, thus takes a new shape to plague Middle-Earth until the end of time. Only at the End of the World, at what Tolkien called the Last Battle and Day of Doom, would the forces of Ilúvatar finally defeat Melkor. Only then would the great tale come to its end.[18]

Besides suggesting that Tolkien is better understood if one emphasizes the unity of his works, one can argue that this understanding is deepened once one realizes that he was so influenced by his beliefs as a Catholic, both consciously and unconsciously, that he has created a world, and the mythology which springs from it, that is fundamentally Christian and Catholic. To be more precise, if one turns to Tolkien's "story" as a whole, that great tale Sam speaks about being involved in, one can say

that the conflict between Ilúvatar and Melkor, found to be the major unifying element in Tolkien's works, is pictured in theological and biblical terms that closely parallel the terms used to describe the conflict in Christianity between God and Satan.

To suggest this is to assume, of course, that Roman Catholicism significantly influenced Tolkien, and readers who know Tolkien only through The Lord of the Rings may immediately object to this assumption since it seems to be an undeniable fact that Middle-Earth is a world in which God, as Christians and Catholics typically picture Him, is either absent or simply does not exist. However, to divorce an author's work from the influences of his daily life, imperceptible as they may be, is itself a questionable assumption; a literary work is not, after all, created in a vacuum but grows out of the many different influences to which an author is exposed. An author, Tolkien himself says in his "Foreword" to The Lord of the Rings, cannot remain wholly unaffected by his experience; and in his case, that experience would include his Catholicism which, according to Carpenter, was an important element shaping his life from early childhood. He was, Carpenter judges, a "profoundly religious man" whose religion was "one of the deepest and strongest elements in his personality."[19] His attendance at daily Mass, his love of Benediction, his special reverence for the Virgin Mary, his almost medieval attitude to confession before communion--all these are indications of this important element. It seems not only relevant but logical, then, to assume that his beliefs as a Catholic have left some discernible trace on his mythological world.

This assumption is confirmed by the fact that Tolkien spoke about both myth-making and his works in Christian and Catholic terms. Myth-

making was not for Tolkien a mere pastime by which he amused himself and others but a serious pursuit that was basically Christian. In writing myth or fantasy or fairy-stories, man can become a "Sub-creator" whose work can reflect God Himself and "actually assist in the effoliation and multiple enrichment of creation."[20] This idea Tolkien proposed in a lecture on fairy-stories which he delivered at the University of St. Andrews on March 8, 1939, but it dates to at least 1931 when he wrote a poem to C.S. Lewis in which he touched on this idea. This poem, entitled "Mythopoeia," or "the making of myths," was written in either late September or early October 1931 because Tolkien composed it as a result of a conversation he had with C.S. Lewis on the night of September 19, 1931 about the truth of Christianity; that conversation led to Lewis's conversion to Christianity twelve days later.[21] The poem, however, was not written simply to record this conversation; it is Tolkien's answer to Lewis's charge that Fantasy is a lie--that, at least, is how Tolkien explains it in the version of the Andrew Lang lecture which was later published in The Tolkien Reader.[22] Responding to the rhetorical question whether Fantasy is legitimate, Tolkien says, "As for its legitimacy I will say no more than to quote a brief passage from a letter I once wrote to a man who described myth and fairy-story as 'lies'; though to do him justice he was kind enough and confused enough to call fairy-story-making 'Breathing a lie through Silver.'"[23] Tolkien then quotes "Mythopoeia," although the version he uses is slightly different from the version found in Carpenter's biography.

> 'Dear Sir,' I said--'Although now long estranged
> Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
> Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,
> and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:

> Man, Sub-creator, the refracted Light
> through whom is splintered from a single White
> to many hues, and endlessly combined
> in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
> Though all the crannies of the world we filled
> with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build
> Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
> and sowed the seeds of dragons--'twas our right
> (used or misused). That right has not decayed:
> We make still by the law in which we're made.'[24]

Exactly what Tolkien meant by this poem becomes clearer if one turns to Carpenter's biography where he reconstructs the conversation between Tolkien and Lewis on that September night of 1931. What Carpenter does is to present a prose rendition of "Mythopoeia," which explicitly shows how myth reflects God and why it is therefore implicitly Christian.

> We have come from God (continued Tolkien), and inevitably the myths woven by us, though they contain error, will also reflect a splintered fragment of the true light, the eternal truth that is with God. Indeed only by myth-making, only by becoming a 'sub-creator' and inventing stories, can Man ascribe to the state of perfection that he knew before the Fall. Our myths may be misguided, but they steer however shakily towards the true harbour, while materialistic 'progress' leads only to a yawning abyss and the Iron Crown of the power of evil.[25]

Tolkien did qualify this idea, however, by insisting that such stories must be "complete" or "true," and for Tolkien this form of the fairy-story was the one he described as "eucatastrophic." This adjective he derived from "Eucatastrophe," a word he coined as an antonym to "Catastrophe" and defined as "the consolation of the Happy Ending." This happy ending is the fairy-story's "highest function" and is analogous to the "happy ending" of the Gospel story.

> The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn' (for there is no true end to any fairy-tale): this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well, is not essentially 'escapist,' nor 'fugitive.' In its fairy-tale--

> or otherworld--setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of dyscatastrophe, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of the deliverance; it denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. [26]

Besides studying Tolkien's work in the light of his Andrew Lang lecture, one must also consider it in the light of a few brief but illuminating comments which he made after The Lord of the Rings was published; since he explains ideas and characters in religious and Catholic terms, he seems to suggest strongly that he was influenced by his religion as he wrote although he also leaves the impression that such influence was more unconscious than conscious. His clearest statements about this matter are found scattered in conversations, letters, and the notes which accompany the songs in the song-cycle, The Road Goes Ever On, co-authored with Mr. Donald Swann; unfortunately, however, what Tolkien reveals is so brief that he appears almost reluctant to elaborate further. In a conversation with Edmund Fuller in June of 1962, first of all, he said without hesitation but also without elaboration that Gandalf was an "angel."[27] In the song-cycle, he speaks of Elbereth or Varda, the queen of Valier, in similar terms as "angelic" and "divine"; he speaks also of the Valar who became "self-incarnated" for "their love and desire for the Children of God"; more significantly, in explaining the invocations to Elbereth in The Lord of the Rings, he writes that "These and other references to religion in The Lord of the Rings are frequently overlooked."[28] Precisely what Tolkien meant by "other references" is unclear because, again, he comments no further. Of the Elves, he suggests that they are best understood as "Man before the Fall which deprived him of his powers

of achievement."[29] Finally, he told Clyde S. Kilby, an American scholar who offered to help him complete The Silmarillion for publication during the summer of 1966, that the "Secret Fire sent to burn at the heart of the World" in The Silmarillion was the Holy Spirit.[30]

While one may be tempted to conclude that these comments prove that Tolkien consciously intended to write Christian and Catholic works, caution is necessary because these comments were given years after The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion were finished. Two letters indicate just the opposite. In a letter to Kilby, Tolkien wrote about a paper by a professor from New South Wales entitled "Kingship, Priesthood and Prophecy in The Lord of the Rings." While he found merit with the paper, he also had some reservations:

> Much of this is true enough--except, of course, the general impression given (almost irresistibly in articles having this analytical approach, whether by Christians or not) that I had any such 'schema' in my conscious mind before or during the writing.[31]

Of more importance, because of its length and because it was written to a close personal friend, is the other letter which Tolkien wrote. In 1953, at Tolkien's request, Robert Murray, S.J., commented on what he had read of The Lord of the Rings; he told Tolkien that the book was "all about grace" even though the word was never mentioned. Tolkien responded:

> I think I know exactly what you mean by the order of grace; and of course by your references to Our Lady, upon which all my own small perception of beauty both in majesty and simplicity is founded. The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like "religion," to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism. However that is very clumsily put, and sounds more self-important than I feel. For as a matter of fact, I have consciously planned very little, and should chiefly be grateful

> for having been brought up (since I was eight) in a faith that has nourished me and taught me all the little that I know; and that I owe to my mother, who clung to her conversion and died young, largely through the hardships of poverty resulting from it.[32]

While these comments provide evidence that Tolkien did indeed view his Middle-Earth in Catholic terms, this evidence must be used carefully. Perhaps the best starting point is to carefully examine his very specific comment that "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work." Since this statement comes in direct response to what seems Murray's opinion that the trilogy contains references to grace and to the Virgin Mary, one may tentatively conclude that Tolkien meant that this work was religious and Catholic because of the presence of these two specific Catholic beliefs.[33] While this seems to be what he almost certainly meant, he does not explicitly say so; instead of clarifying this statement further by referring Murray to examples of these beliefs in the text that will confirm what he suspects, Tolkien abruptly shifts to another line of thought, explaining that it is religious and Catholic because of the revision which he consciously undertook. He says this revision explains why he has deleted all references to "religion" and he concludes, again somewhat abruptly, that "the religious element has been absorbed into the story and the symbolism." The problem with this explanation is that it is really not an adequate one; what one is left with is only Tolkien's conviction that these elements are there. Thus, while the reasons why the work can be described as religious and Catholic seem so obvious to Tolkien that he need not elaborate, they are not necessarily so obvious to anyone else, Catholic or non-Catholic, who reads either The Lord of the Rings or this letter.

Rather than concluding that Tolkien's vagueness here stems from

the fact that he had not thought the matter over carefully enough himself so that he could express himself clearly, one should conclude the most probable reason for his lack of clarity is that he was writing to a personal friend, not preparing a carefully argued explanation which he intended to publish.[34] Had he known that the letter would be published posthumously, he would no doubt have taken more care because he knew that his explanation was "clumsily put." One must also remember that the letter was written to a man who shared Tolkien's Catholic faith and was already convinced that the work was meaningful in terms of Catholic theological beliefs.

Whether this is the precise reason why Tolkien is unclear does not really matter, however; what matters is that this letter does make more sense when it is read in view of the other comments he made about Middle-Earth and religion. Once this is done, one can draw two conclusions about how Catholicism is present in his work, though it is so "absorbed" that one need not recognize it in order to enjoy and understand his work. First of all, since Tolkien indirectly admits the presence of the Catholic beliefs in grace and the Virgin Mary in The Lord of the Rings and elsewhere says that religious references are frequently overlooked, he does not mean that these and other religious elements have been lost or buried in the text when he says that they have been "absorbed." Secondly, if one recalls his explanations about Gandalf's being an "angel" and the Elves "Man before the Fall," he seems to be implying that Middle-Earth can be viewed or understood from two different perspectives. On the one hand, it is understood as it is--a self-contained imaginary world that makes complete sense by itself without reference to any set of religious beliefs, Catholic or non-Catholic. From this view, characters and events are

understood in terms of Middle-Earth alone. Elbereth and Gandalf, Eärendil and Aragorn, each of these characters can be understood as each is--as representatives of different kinds of beings, divine, elven, and mortal. On the other hand, Tolkien's comments about Gandalf and the Elves leave no doubt that these characters, and presumably other characters and events, were meaningful to him in terms of Catholic theology at the same time. Consequently, he implies, they become more meaningful to the reader who views them through the perspective provided by a knowledge of certain Catholic beliefs and doctrines that Tolkien believed in.

Why this approach to Middle-Earth is valid and best explains what Tolkien meant becomes evident if one turns to those two elements Tolkien suggests are present in The Lord of the Rings, belief in the Virgin Mary and in grace, and shows how they make more meaningful key events of the trilogy even though they are "absorbed" into the story. Since Tolkien's view that religious references were frequently overlooked came in connection with his explanation about the invocations to Elbereth, one can hypothesize that Elbereth, though not to be identified with the Virgin Mary, can be understood meaningfully in terms of the Virgin. As Catholics call upon Mary for help in a dark and sinful world, so too do various characters call upon Elbereth in the course of The Lord of the Rings. Given Tolkien's known reverence for Mary, such a parallel is, to use Carpenter's expression, "illuminating." What seems to confirm this interpretation and make it more than speculation is Tolkien's use of March 25. It is surely not accidental that Tolkien has chosen March 25, the Feastday of the Annunciation, a feastday in honor of the Virgin Mary in the Catholic calendar, as the date for two significant events in the Third Age of Middle-Earth history. It is the date on which Gandalf and

Thorin meet by "chance" to decide how to regain the dwarves' treasure from the dragon Smaug (III, Appendix A, 447); it is during the trip to recover this treasure that the hobbit Bilbo is lost in the Misty Mountains, meets Gollum, and "accidentally" finds the One Ruling Ring lost by Sauron ages earlier. Exactly seventy eight years later on March 25, the Ring is destroyed in the fires of Mount Doom, and with its destruction peace is again restored and the Fourth Age of Middle-Earth history begins. Finding and destroying this Ring are not, howevever, the "accidental" events that they may appear to be; rather both events come about by a chain of events that suggests providential aid, for the Fellowship narrowly escapes several times from certain death . In many cases, unexpected, unlooked-for aid comes just in time. In Catholic theology, such aid is "grace," divine assistance unmerited and freely given. One need not "read into" The Lord of the Rings to suggest that Tolkien meant these things when he told Murray that he knew exactly what he meant by his references to Mary and to the "order of grace."

While these beliefs do seem to prove that Tolkien did view Middle-Earth from two perspectives, it does not necessarily follow that he viewed The Silmarillion from two perspectives. Nevertheless, since he never conceived of these works as separate and revised The Silmarillion so that it harmonized with The Lord of the Rings, one can logically assume that he viewed all events of Middle-Earth in this way. Thus, the "order of grace" found operating in the trilogy is but part of a providential order that extends back to the very earliest moments of Middle-Earth when Ilúvatar created it. This suggestion can be proven by turning to examine the assumptions upon which Middle-Earth is built.

Chapter II

Theological and Biblical Assumptions in Middle-Earth

Before studying in any detail the conflict between Ilúvatar and Melkor, it is important to realize that at the heart of Tolkien's imaginary world of Middle-Earth are a number of beliefs or assumptions that are theological in nature. To avoid misunderstanding Tolkien, one must examine these beliefs which he takes for granted because, while he nowhere explicitly formulates this set of beliefs, they are implicitly present, giving meaning and coherence to his mythological world. Given Tolkien's religious background and beliefs as a Catholic, it is hardly surprising to find that these beliefs are not entirely original but traditionally Catholic and, in part, biblical.

The most important premise that Tolkien makes is that his Middle-Earth is ruled by a Supreme Being who is modeled on the Catholic notion of God. This becomes clear as one studies Tolkien's Creation account because this account parallels the Genesis Creation story in several important ways. First of all, Tolkien's Supreme Being, Ilúvatar, like the God of Genesis, is omnipotent. Creation comes neither as a result of accident nor from the struggle between two equally powerful divine Beings, but begins with Ilúvatar's creation of the Valar, divine beings who display the attributes of beings whom Catholics would call angels. These Valar are invited to adorn a mighty theme (15). Another indication of His supreme power is that no theme can be played that does not have its source in Him (17); hence, the most triumphant notes of Melkor are

woven into Ilúvatar's own solemn pattern (17), and Ilúvatar can use Melkor as His instrument to bring good out of evil (17). Like the God of Genesis, Ilúvatar is good, and everything that he creates is therefore good. Even though the Vala Melkor almost immediately becomes evil because he wishes to increase the power and glory of his part by bringing into being creatures of his own (16), this does not mean that Ilúvatar contains evil within Him, for those whom He creates have free will, like Melkor, to obey or disobey. Finally, like the Creator of Genesis, Tolkien's Supreme Being is omniscient. Shortly after creating the Valar, He reveals to them a vision with a beginning and an end (15); all is foreshown and forethought in this vision though not yet achieved (49); yet what is to happen is not entirely certain because the vision is taken away before the fulfillment of the Dominion of Men and the Fading of the Firstborn, the Eldar (20). To none but Himself does Ilúvatar reveal all that He has in store (18); thus even the Valar have not seen as with sight the Later Ages or the Ending of the World (20). Centuries later, the Númenóreans are told by messengers of the Valar that Ilúvatar has not revealed all things that are to come (265).

Before considering the consequences of this belief in a Supreme Being, one should also note that Tolkien strengthens the parallel between Ilúvatar and the Genesis Creator by depending on the biblical account for many minor details in his own. Just as Genesis pictures an abyss or void, in Tolkien music goes forth into the void, and it is no longer void. Ilúvatar's "Ea: Let things be" recalls God's command in Genesis, "Let it be"; similarly, Tolkien's use of "And so it was" and "In the beginning" (see, for example, the opening words of The Valaquenta, the Eldar's account about the Valar and the Maiar) are conscious borrowings

from Genesis. Finally, as man and woman are promised dominion over creation in the biblical account, the Children of Ilúvatar are promised dominion, first the Eldar, then Mortal Men. The only difference here is that Tolkien departs from the biblical account to borrow a later Christian tradition, found, for example, in the Anglo-Saxon Genesis and in Paradise Lost, that man and woman are created because of the disobedience of Satan. Thus, in Tolkien, out of the discord which Melkor brings to the harmony of the music of Creation, Ilúvatar conceives His Children.

Because Tolkien's belief in a Supreme Being is a major premise in his imaginary world, one should examine the various consequences of this belief. These consequences, along with the belief in a Supreme Being, are those assumptions which are Catholic and biblical in nature and upon which Tolkien's work rests. First of all, because Tolkien describes a Divine Being who reveals to the Valar a vision with a beginning and an end, he rejects the notion that history is a never-ending cycle. Even though his concept of history--three successive ages--may appear to dramatize a recurrent cycle in which good and evil are precariously balanced, with neither side able to achieve final victory, the appearance is deceptive. Tolkien does not endorse a cyclical view of history in which, while evil may be temporarily defeated, it will inevitably return again and again. Proof for this is the fact that, while Tolkien has not written an account about the end of Middle-Earth, some twenty-three references in The Silmarillion allude to an end-time. Several of these indicate that Tolkien thought history would end with a final climactic battle between the forces of good and evil. The idea of a Last Battle and Day of Doom is found in both the northern mythological tradition of Ragnarok, the Battle between the gods and giants, and in the Battle

between God and Satan in the Book of Revelation. One can speculate that Tolkien knew both traditions but found more suited to his purpose the notion present in the Book of Revelation that Satan is utterly defeated. Northern paganism could have given him no more than the name for this Battle, for the ambiguous ending in northern mythology is in conflict with his belief in the clear, decisive victory of Ilúvatar.

Belief in a Supreme Being has secondly led Tolkien to dramatize a world in which chance has little part. History cannot be a series of random or accidental events; rather, he insists that behind the complex events of Middle-Earth lies an almost imperceptible but providential plan or design of the Supreme Being. This belief finds expression in The Hobbit, adding to the end of the story a note of seriousness which jars with the predominantly light-hearted tone of this adventure. Yet Gandalf's mild rebuff of Bilbo for his lack of belief in "the prophecies" is worth quoting since it conveys so well a major theme that is at the heart of both The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion. "You don't really suppose, do you," he asks Bilbo, "that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?" (286) That many "adventures" and "escapes" are not "mere luck" but occur because of divine or providential assistance is demonstrated again and again in both works.

The most sustained example of a chain of "chance" events that defies accidental arrangement begins with the finding of Sauron's One Ruling Ring, "found again by a chance more strange than even Mithrandir had foreseen" (302). Feeling that they have been "bidden" to find each other, Gandalf and Thorin meet (III, Appendix A, 447-48) in "a chance meeting, as we say in Middle-Earth" (III, Appendix A, 449). From this meeting comes the journey of Bilbo and the dwarves to recover the gold from the

dragon Smaug. While lost in the Misty Mountains, Bilbo finds the Ring, "a strange chance, if chance it was," Gandalf tells the Council of Elrond (I, 328). Yet, as he had earlier told Frodo, Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, in which case Frodo was meant to have it (I, 88). Frodo, therefore, has been chosen (I, 95). The fact that Frodo and his companions reach Rivendell without capture appears to be "mere luck," yet two events suggest otherwise. By "a strange chance" (I, 118) the hobbits encounter Noldorian elves just in time for them to frighten away the Black Rider who has been pursuing the hobbits; Gildor, their leader, feels that "In this meeting there may be more than chance" (I, 124). Later, after he rescues the hobbits from Old Man Willow, Tom tells the hobbits that "Just chance brought me then, if chance you call it. It was no plan of mine. . . ." (I, 175). Finally, at the Council of Elrond, Elrond speaks of the assembly's being "ordered" to decide the fate of the Ring.

> You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others must now find counsel for the peril of the world. (I, 318)

Another consequence that seems to follow logically from belief in the supreme power of Ilúvatar is the continuing presence of Ilúvatar and his emissaries. Even though Ilúvatar is said to be beyond the confines or circles of the world (20, 253), this does not necessarily mean that He has withdrawn from Creation. His continuing, active presence is, however, seen for the most part in his appointed emissaries, the Valar, the Maiar, and the Istari.

Because there can be no sharp distinction between natural and supernatural in a world ruled by a Creator who is actively present, the continuing presence of Ilúvatar involves, as another consequence, what a modern

view of history would consider violations of "natural" law; but since Tolkien's Middle-Earth is so similar to the biblical world of the Old and New Testaments in which no distinction is made between natural and supernatural, providential aid through dreams, prophecies, signs, and portents is natural rather than extraordinary. Just as the biblical writers would not have considered extraordinary such phenomena as angelic appearances and revelation through dreams because of their conviction about God's active presence in their history, so too does Tolkien take for granted the appearances of the Valar to certain Children of Ilúvatar. Such appearances, prophecies and future foreshadowings are not plot manipulations; they are intrinsic to his providential view of history. Hence, Frodo, is unlike other hobbits because he has been "chosen"; but he is unlike them also because he often sees future events in his dreams (I, 71, 154, 177, 187, 342; III, 384). This fact is not a violation of "natural" law; rather, it places him in the special company of other Children of Ilúvatar like Beren, Tuor, and Eärendil who have been similarly "chosen" or "doomed" to further the plans of Ilúvatar.

When one turns to the premises which Tolkien makes about evil, one finds, again, that Tolkien's ideas are traditionally Catholic and biblical. Tolkien seems familiar, for example, with a principle about evil long ago enunciated by Catholic theologians like Thomas Aquinas--evil cannot but parody Good. Thus, Melkor is contrasted with the Vala Aulë, for while Aulë remained faithful to Ilúvatar, Melkor "spent his spirit in envy and hate, until at last he could make nothing save in mockery of the thought of others" (27). Consequently, Melkor and, later, Saruman, an Istar who falls to evil, are only parodying the act of creation when, first, Melkor creates the orcs in mockery of the Eldar (50) and Saruman breeds a sturdier type

that can withstand the sight of the Sun. Tolkien also aligns himself with traditional theological principles in showing that Melkor can only bring forth evil out of good as he does when he casts his shadow upon death and confounds it with darkness (42). In the same perverted way, he twists to his own evil purposes the silence of the Valar about the coming of Mortal Men; because the Valar have not spoken about the coming of Men, he speaks to the Eldar in secret, hoping to delude them into believing that Men are to be created to supplant the Eldar as rulers of Middle-Earth (68). What most distinguishes Melkor and all other evil beings from Ilúvatar, however, is their desire to dominate.

> Last of all is set the name of Melkor, He who arises in Might. But that name he has forfeited; and the Noldor, who among the Elves suffered most from his malice, will not utter it, and they name him Morgoth, the Dark Enemy of the World. Great might was given to him by Iluvatar, and he was coeval with Manwë. In the powers and knowledge of all the other Valar he had part, but he turned them to evil purposes, and squandered his strength in violence and tyranny. For he coveted Arda and all that was in it, desiring the kingship of Manwë and dominion over the realms of his peers.
>
> From splendour he fell through arrogance to contempt for all things save himself, a spirit wasteful and pitiless. Understanding he turned to subtlety in perverting to his own will all that he would use, until he became a liar without shame. He began with the desire of Light, but when he could not possess it for himself alone, he descended through fire and wrath into a great burning, down into Darkness.
>
> Among those of his servants that have names the greatest was that spirit whom the Eldar called Sauron, or Gorthaur the Cruel. In his beginning he was of the Maiar of Aulë, and he remained mighty in the lore of that people. In all the deeds of Melkor the Morgoth upon Arda, in his vast works and in the deceits of his cunning, Sauron had a part, and was only less evil than his master in that for long he served another, and not himself. But in after years he rose like a shadow of Morgoth and a ghost of his malice, and walked behind him on the same ruinous path down into the Void. (31-32)

The fact that both Melkor and Sauron are cast out into the Void indicates their inferiority to Ilúvatar; nonetheless, Tolkien is true to Catholicism in emphasizing their great powers and their continuing presence in Middle-

Earth. Melkor is very powerful because he was given "the greatest gifts of power and knowledge" (16); even though he is said to be coeval with Manwë, High King of the Valar, Ilúvatar elsewhere says that he is the "mightiest" of the Ainur. Consequently, his power to do great evil is not necessarily limited because he has been shut out in the Void. This continuing, active presence is carried out principally through his emissaries.

Besides describing the presence of both Ilúvatar and Melkor in terms drawn from the Bible and from Catholic theology, Tolkien has also chosen to describe the conflict between these divine Beings in terms of two well-known images found in the New Testament. The first image that defines the relationship between them, the contrast between darkness and light, is found in many passages of the New Testament, but Tolkien may have drawn it specifically from the Gospel of John in which Jesus is spoken of as the Light of the World who shines in the world and is not overcome by it. In John's Gospel the world is a realm of darkness where men love the darkness rather than the light; indeed, such men will kill Jesus; hence, Jesus's strong indictment:

> And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light lest his deeds should be exposed. (John 3: 19-20)

Middle-Earth is a world similarly divided between those who hate the light and those who love it. Haldir the elf pictures the struggle between Sauron and the leaders of the West in the same imagery when he speaks to Frodo and his companions in Lothlórien:

> In this high place you may see the two powers that are opposed to one another; and ever they strive now in thought, but whereas the light perceives the very heart

> of darkness, its own secret has not been discovered.
> (I, 456)

This certainly seems a conscious borrowing from the fifth verse of John's Prologue, "And the light shines in the darkness; and the darkness grasped it not" (John 1:5).

The darkness and shadow that oppose light in Middle-Earth are both literal and figurative. Literally, both Melkor and Sauron become Dark Lords on dark thrones, for they lose their original brightness. Ungoliant and Shelob, both monstrous spiders, shun the light, as do Gollum and the orcs. Figuratively, however, both Melkor and Sauron cast a shadow that strangles the will; it is this shadow that Melkor casts upon death so that it is confounded with darkness and men fear death (42).

The darkness which Haldir speaks about is the darkness caused by Sauron in the closing days of the Third Age of Middle-Earth, yet darkness has attacked the good since the beginning when Melkor destroyed the two light-giving Lamps of Middle-Earth, Illuin and Ormal (35-36). Later with the help of Ungoliant and the darkness which she weaves around them, Melkor destroys the two light-giving Trees of the Blessed Realm, Telperion and Laurelin (76). Fleeing to Middle-Earth, he takes up his abode in Utumno, his fortress, and spreads darkness over Middle-Earth.

Of the Children of Ilúvatar, Men are the most easily ensnared by this darkness. When Finrod Felagund, elven lord of Nargothrond, discovers men and asks of their background, Bëor, their leader, says that a darkness lies behind them. "Westwards our hearts have been turned and we believe that there we shall find the Light" (141). In "Akallabêth," the narrative which tells of the downfall of Númenor, the island given to Men as a gift for their aid in the wars against Melkor, Tolkien summarizes the fate of Men in Middle-Earth in terms of light and darkness:

> It is said by the Eldar that Men came into the world in the time of the Shadow of Morgoth, and they fell swiftly under his dominion; for he sent his emissaries among them, and they listened to his evil and cunning words, and they worshipped the Darkness yet feared it. But there were some that turned from evil and left the lands of their kindred, and wandered ever westwards; for they heard a rumour that in the West there was a light which the Shadow could not dim. . . . And after the victory of the Lords of the West those of the evil Men who were not destroyed fled back into the east. . . .evil Men came among them, and cast over them a shadow of fear, and they took them for Kings. Then the Valar forsook for a time the Men of Middle-Earth who had refused their summons and had taken the friends of Morgoth to be their masters; and Men dwelt in darkness and were troubled by many evil things that Morgoth had devised in the days of his dominion. . . . (259-60)

Against the power of darkness and evil the peoples of Middle-Earth are not without hope since Varda, known as Elbereth, the Queen of the Valier and spouse of Manwë, first makes the stars and then, with the help of the Valar, creates the Sun and the Moon. The Sun and the Moon are Maiar whom the Valar transform into vessels of light. Arien, the Sun, is a spirit of flame whom Melkor did not corrupt into his service; had she been corrupted, she would have presumably become a Balrog, for these fallen beings in the service of Melkor had hearts of fire (47). Far more symbolic as light images which oppose darkness, however, are the stars created by Varda. Because they are far removed from the evil of Middle-Earth, they are symbols of a divine order that can never be conquered by evil. When, for example, Sam and Frodo have almost given up hope of reaching Mount Doom and completing the quest to destroy the Ring, Sam sights a star which renews his hope.

> The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing; there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach. (III, 244)

The stars of Middle-Earth that carry symbolic significance are the constellations Orion and Ursa Major and the star before dawn, the planet Venus. Created by Varda in preparation for the coming of the Eldar, the two constellations also symbolize that the Shadow is "only a small and passing thing." Orion, known as "Menelmacar with his shining belt," forebodes the Last Battle at the end of days (48), while Ursa Major, known as "Valacirca," a crown of seven stars, is set in the north as a challenge to Melkor; it is the Sickle of the Valar and a sign of doom (48). The star before dawn, Venus, is in reality Eärendil, the half-mortal, half-elven father of Elrond and Elros; he is transformed into a star to bring hope to the peoples of Middle-Earth. Sailing in his hallowed ship, Vingilot, he wears upon his brow the Silmaril stolen from Morgoth by Beren.

The care with which Tolkien has unified The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings becomes evident if one notes the recurrence of these star images in The Lord of the Rings. By "chance," the hobbits meet Noldorian elves who are singing a song in praise of Elbereth, the name which they use for Varda in the lands of exile (I, 489). Their feasting is delayed until the stars rise that night, the last one being the constellation Orion, the Swordsman of the Sky, known to the hobbits as "Menelvagor with his shining belt" (I, 120). Later at Bree, Frodo sees the Sickle, the constellation of the seven stars, just before going to sleep. It is not a coincidence that Frodo sees the Sickle just after having met Strider, revealed as Aragorn son of Arathorn who will become King of Gondor at the close of the Third Age. Its inclusion at this point is appropriate since the crown of seven stars is a sign which Aragorn will use himself. The seven stars are forged on his sword (I, 362) and sewn on the banner which

he carries into battle (III, 150). Later after the victory over Sauron, he will meet Frodo and Sam on the Field of Cormallen with his banner (III, 285). Finally, when he is crowned King, he is crowned with an ancient crown studded with seven gems of adamant (III, 303). It is an ancient symbol of hope, then, found alike on the Doors of Moria (I, 397) and preserved in a rhyme which Gandalf recites to Pippin (II, 258; III, 27). As the man who will become King and usher in the Age of the Dominion of Men, it is significant that his symbols of kingship--his sword, his banner, and his crown--are marked with this design; it suggests that the Fourth Age, the Age of Man, begins under the divine auspices of Varda and her Creator, Ilúvatar.

By far the most important star symbol is Eärendil. In references to Eärendil in The Lord of the Rings is seen the struggle between Ilúvatar (light, sun, moon and star) and Melkor (darkness, shadow). Eärendil is said to shine above Lothlórien immediately after Frodo has looked into the Mirror of Galadriel and seen the Eye of Sauron (I, 472). The continuing hope and aid that he brings to Middle-Earth is literally given to Frodo when Galadriel gives him the phial in which is captured the light of Eärendil. On the four occasions when Frodo and Sam use the phial, it saves them from the monstrous spider Shelob and from the malevolent Watchers of the Tower of Cirith Ungol (II, 418, 430; III, 218, 234). On two of these occasions, using the phial gives them the ability to speak in Elvish and call upon Elbereth; this is a language which neither Frodo nor Sam speak, though Frodo has some knowledge of the language. The divine power of Eärendil is described as Frodo walks toward Shelob, holding the phial aloft before her eyes.

> No brightness so deadly had ever afflicted them before. From sun and moon and star they had been safe underground, but now a star had descended into the very earth. Still it approached, and the eyes began to quail. One by one they all went dark; they turned away, and a great bulk, beyond the light's reach, heaved its huge shadow in between. They were gone. (II, 420)

The second New Testament image that Tolkien uses is the image of sowing. While several parables in the New Testament speak of sowing, he seems to have drawn his ideas from Matthew's parable about the weeds sown in a field at night (Matthew 13: 24-30). In this parable Jesus compares the spread of the Kingdom of God to the situation where a sower plants a field, only to learn that during the night a secret enemy has planted weeds in his field. When he learns what his enemy has done, rather than having the weeds pulled immediately, the sower tells his laborers to let the wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest; at the harvest the weeds will be gathered and thrown into the fire. Tolkien's Middle-Earth is the field in which good and evil are inextricably mixed, and evil will not be rooted out until the end of time. The good sower is Ilúvatar, while the enemy coming in the night is Melkor. Numerous references in both The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings support this idea of the two sowers.

The unrest that leads to the rebellion of the Noldor against the Valar in the First Age begins with a seed that has been sown in the dark by Melkor (70), but bringing the Noldor to rebellion through the pride of Fëanor, one of the greatest of the Noldor, is a long labor. "Long was Melkor at work, and slow at first and barren was his labour. But he that sows in the end shall not lack a harvest, and soon he may rest from toil indeed while others reap and sow in his stead" (68). To make others sow the evil he has planted is Melkor's strategy. In the distrust that spreads

among the Noldor because of Fëanor's rebellion, Melkor sees the seed of many dissensions; he hopes to continue to sow fear and disunion among the Eldar (116). As part of his strategy he spies upon Men shortly after their appearance in Middle-Earth, hoping to cause them to distrust and fear the Eldar, but since this design is slow to ripen (142), he attacks Men who then become allies of the Eldar. Even though this union of the Eldar and Men protects them for a time, all kingdoms eventually fall to Melkor. Even Gondolin, the city that long remains hidden from Melkor, eventually falls through the treachery of Maeglin, whose coming to the city was a dark seed of evil sown (139). At the end of The Silmarillion Tolkien concludes: "Yet the lies that Melkor, the mighty and accursed, Morgoth Bauglir, the Power of Terror and of Hate, sowed in the hearts of Elves and Men are a seed that does not die and cannot be destroyed; and ever and anon it sprouts anew, and will bear fruit even unto the latest days" (255). Even though Melkor is cast out into the Void at the end of the First Age, then, the seeds of evil still grow and sprout, bearing evil fruit, if any will tend them (260). As if to fulfill this, Sauron arises again in Middle-Earth in the Second Age, turning back to the evil in which he was nurtured by Morgoth (267), and causes the downfall of the Númenóreans who, like the Noldor, rebel against the Valar and bring about their own destruction. At the beginning of the Third Age, Sauron's plans for the destruction of the last heirs of Númenor and the conquest of Middle-Earth are said to be but ripening (297).

Against the evils of Melkor and Sauron the peoples of Middle-Earth are not entirely helpless, however, because Ilúvatar opposes Melkor with his own emissaries. Yavanna, spouse of Aulë, plants seeds, too (35), and when Melkor is temporarily frustrated by the creation of the Sun and the

Moon, "new things, devised long ages before in the thought of Yavanna and sown as seed in the dark," come to fruition (104). In the Second Age, when the rebellious Númenóreans question Ilúvatar's decree that Men must die, they are told that Ilúvatar does not plant to no purpose (265). Gandalf the Istar speaks in similar terms. To combat the growing despair of Denethor, Steward of Gondor, that all is lost before the power of Sauron, Gandalf retorts that he too is a steward and he hopes that some things will pass through the night to bear fruit (III, 33). Later, after Sauron's first attack against Gondor is turned back, Gandalf tells the Captains of the West in "The Last Debate" that their task is to uproot the evil in the fields that they know so that those who live after may have a clean earth to till (III, 190). In this context, Galadriel's gift to Sam takes on a symbolic significance (I, 486). Literally, the box of earth which she gives Sam restores the Shire to its original beauty before the evil caused by Saruman and his henchmen (III, 374-75); but symbolically, the gift is restoring the Shire and, by extension, all of Middle-Earth to the original beauty of Creation intended by Ilúvatar. The fact that Tolkien describes the vale of Anduin as a garden after Sauron's defeat (III, 307) recalls his description of Middle-Earth after Creation as a garden (21) and may be an allusion to the Garden of Eden.

Biblical and Catholic theological thought have also influenced his ideas about the nature of evil. One is not surprised to find, for instance, that Pride, the chief of the Seven Deadly Sins in Catholic moral theology and the cause of Satan's damnation, is the major sin of many of his characters. Morgoth, in his great pride, does not think that he will be attacked (250), but the Valar conquer him and thrust him into the Void. Because of pride both Túrin (212, 213) and Turgon (240) refuse to heed the

warnings of the Vala Ulmo about approaching evil, and the Elvish kingdom of Nargothrond and the hidden city of Gondolin fall as a result. Similarly, when Thingol is murdered by dwarves because of his pride and greed for the Silmaril stolen by Beren, his kingdom begins to crumble. Finally, Númenor is destroyed by Ilúvatar at the height of its pride because King Ar-Pharazôn, at the instigation of Sauron, invades the Blessed Realm to wrest the gift of immortality from the Valar.

Another assumption that Tolkien makes about the nature of evil is voiced by Aragorn when Aragorn tells Éomer of Rohan that good and evil have not changed since yesteryear and that they are the same among Elves, Dwarves, and Men (II, 50). So often, in fact, does evil display the same, predictable qualities in Middle-Earth that one can speak of a Satanic type or types characterized by pride, greed, brooding, and images of fire. Since Melkor is the arch-sinner, his life establishes a pattern to which other beings--divine and non-divine--conform. His pride (81, 251) leads him to wish to dominate others. He wants "to subdue to his will both Elves and Men. . .to be called Lord, and to be master over wills" (18). He tells Ungoliant that he is Lord of the World (80); he calls himself King of the World when he returns to Middle-Earth after destroying the Two Trees of the Blessed Realm (81). He covets the earth (20-21) and lusts for the Silmarils (67, 68). He fell because desire "grew hot" within him to create his own beings (16). Now corrupted, malice burns in him (21) and the light of his eyes withers (22); enflamed with a desire for the Silmarils, he feels a gnawing fire in his heart (67). He works to kindle the hearts of the Noldor to strife (69); his followers, the Balrogs, likewise have hearts of fire (47). He broods in the outer darkness (35); the brooding shadow in the north is always a threat to the

Elvish kingdoms (113).

Sauron and Saruman display the same typical qualities. Sauron is marred by pride (286, 289; II, 204) and by a desire for dominion in Middle-Earth (267). He names himself Lord of the Earth, wanting to be called master of all things (289). In Mordor, he surrounds his abode with fire (290) and forges rings, desiring to set bonds on the Eldar (287); he gathers rings to thus bring under his sway all those who want secret power beyond their measure (288). In Mordor he broods in the dark (292) and his stronghold is wrapped in brooding gloom (III, 245). The destruction of his army is like the destruction of a swollen, brooding thing (III, 279) and ties in with other references to brooding (III, 261, 291). Saruman, the Istar who falls into evil because of his greed for the One Ring, repeats the pattern once again. His pride has grown great (300; I, 78); he desires to be a tyrant and dark lord (303). Marked by pride and hate (II, 239), he will not serve but command (II, 242).

The pride and greed that destroy these divine beings is also found repeated in the dwarves, the Noldor, and the Númenóreans and their descendants. Lust for the Silmaril that Beren brings to King Thingol, for example, leads dwarves to murder him. Still later dwarves use the seven rings Sauron gives them for gaining wealth, but wrath and an overmastering greed of gold are kindled in their hearts (289-90) and their kingdom of Moria is eventually destroyed. Thror broods on the wealth of Moria (III, Appendix A, 441), and his grandson Thorin broods on the wrongs of his house (III, Appendix A, 447); the embers of his heart grow hot and a great anger burns in him. Because of his greed for the treasure of the dragon Smaug, he is killed in The Hobbit.

Even though all the Noldor are said to become proud (68, 70), the

worst sinners are Fëanor and his sons. Fëanor's pride (69, 82; III, Appendix A, 388) leads to his rebelling against the Valar (82, 86, 264); at the root of this rebellion is his desire to master minds (64). Driven by the fire of his own heart (66), fiercest burns in him the new flame of desire for freedom from the supposed oppression of the Valar (68). When Melkor steals the Silmarils, Fëanor enflames the Noldor to rebellion (169-70); Fëanor seeks the jewels so that the Noldor can become lords of the Light and masters of Arda (83). His words kindle the heart of Galadriel (84). Other fire images characterize him (60, 63, 64, 85, 86, 98). So rash is he that he is finally consumed by the flame of his own wrath, and his body falls to ash when he dies (107). When fellow-elves, the Teleri, refuse to give him ships so that he can pursue Melkor to Middle-Earth, he typically sits in dark thought (87); elsewhere he broods in the dark (78). His sons are also proud and haughty and become driven by a consuming desire to possess the Silmarils.

No less affected by this fatal pattern of pride and greed are the Númenóreans and their descendants in Middle-Earth. After nearly two thousand years of rule, the Númenóreans rebel against the Valar. King Tar-Atanamir and his people are marked by pride (265, 266, 268). Men now desire dominion and wealth in Middle-Earth (266; III, Appendix A, 391). The epitome of Númenor's pride comes with King Ar-Pharazôn, the greatest tyrant since Morgoth (274); he is the mightiest and proudest (270, 274, 278, 280; III, Appendix A, 392). He desires power and sole dominion (270), power and glory (270), the Kingship of the World (III, Appendix A, 392). Knowing that Sauron thwarts his plans, he broods darkly (270). Later, the fleet that sails against the Blessed Realm looms like a brooding cloud (277). Even with the destruction of Númenor to warn them, Men fall again

under evil. Sauron ensnares nine mortal Men who are proud (I, 82), and these become his most terrible servants, the Ringwraiths; the chief of these, the Witch-King of Angmar, is marred by pride (III, Appendix A, 411). Denethor, the last Steward of Gondor is proud (III, 27, 29, 167, Appendix A, 419); he commits suicide because of this pride (III, 157). Boromir, his son and one of the nine who form the Fellowship of the Ring, is also proud (III, Appendix A, 419), and this pride leads him to force Frodo to give him the Ring.

A series of other parallels which relate Tolkien's world to our fallen world also help define the nature of evil in the same Christian, Catholic and biblical terms. Maeglin and Fëanor both share an absorbing interest in mining which recalls the interest of Mammon in Paradise Lost with mining and quarrying Hell. Like Satan in both Paradise Lost and in the Anglo-Saxon Genesis, Melkor and Fëanor both have fortresses in the north. Just as one-third of the angels fall with Satan in Chrsitian tradition, so do the greater parts of the Noldor and Númenóreans fall. Finally, as the Bible characterizes the sin of Pharaoh as hardening of heart, so too does Tolkien characterize Fëanor, the Númenóreans and Ar-Pharazôn, and the Stewards of Gondor (88, 267, 277, 278; III, Appendix A, 414).

The final set of assumptions that must be examined before studying the conflict between Ilúvatar and Melkor concerns Tolkien's beliefs about the consequences of good and evil after the End of the World. There can be no doubt that Tolkien thought there would be a definite end to Middle-Earth. Besides the numerous allusions to the end of days in The Silmarillion, the end of days is indirectly spoken of in connection with his views about death. When the Children of Ilúvatar die, there is a separation of the body and spirit (28, 64, 88, 107, 186, 234). The spirit goes to the Halls

of Mandos, the Vala in charge of the Houses of the Dead (28), those "silent halls beside the Outer Sea" (104). Here the spirits of the dead have a time of "waiting" or "recollection" which, though indeterminate, is not endless. Even though Lúthien is offered a chance to come to Valimar to forget all her grief, for instance, this would only be until the world's end (187). King Ar-Pharazôn and his warriors will only lie imprisoned in the Caves of the Forgotten until the Last Battle and Day of Doom (279). Fëanor, who sits in the Halls of Awaiting (67) and whose spirit has not left Mandos (107), will return at the End when the Sun passes and the Moon falls (67); his sons speak an oath to recover the Silmarils for themselves unto the end of days (83) or until the World ends (169). Finally, Tom Bombadil's chant forbids the Barrow Wight from returning to his barrow "till the world is mended" (I, 197).

Still other references indicate that Tolkien agrees with Catholic and Christian thought that time does not end with the End of the World. The dwarves believe that Aulë takes them to Mandos and that Ilúvatar will hallow them and give them a place among the Children in the End; they believe that they will help with the re-making of Arda after the Last Battle (44). The Dúnedain believe in something beyond death and earthly existence (281) as do Faramir and Aragorn. In his prayer-like gesture before eating with Frodo, Faramir speaks of the custom of the Men of Gondor who look "towards Númenor that was, and beyond to Elvenhome that is, and to that which is beyond Elvenhome and will ever be" (II, 361). Aragorn tells Arwen on his death-bed that they are not bound forever to the circles of the world and beyond there is more than memory (III, Appendix A, 428). Finally, there are comments about the plans of the divine Beings. Tolkien writes that Ilúvatar has not revealed what he purposes

for the Elves after the World's End (42), but there will be a time after the Last Battle when greater music will be made and the themes will be played aright before Ilúvatar (15).

Tolkien's speculations leave unanswered, however, two important questions. The End of the World, seen in terms of a Last Battle and Day of Doom when the Sun and Moon fail, marks a turning point. Clearly implied is a final battle between the forces of good and evil; even more clearly believed is the ultimate defeat of evil. But given the defeat of evil, one naturally wonders whether evil is simply to wither away as a mist, disembodied and powerless, as the deaths of Saruman and Sauron suggest, or whether evil beings are to be punished in a place set aside that one can understand in terms of Hell. What, for example, can happen to Gollum, who seems to deserve damnation? Perhaps the closest thing to damnation is found in the several references to darkness. As Jesus speaks of damnation in terms of darkness, so too does Tolkien. Fëanor and his sons swear by the Everlasting Darkness (83), and Maglor and Maedhros know that they shall have the Everlasting Darkness as their lot (253). Gandalf tells the Captain of the Nazgûl to return to the abyss (III, 125), and when the Captain is killed, he passes into darkness (III, 303). The term "hell" is used six times, always in connection with Melkor but is not capitalized except twice in the expressions, "Hell-wrought bond" (110) and the "Hells of Iron," the description of Angband, Melkor's fortress. Darkness, the abyss, the Void into which Morgoth is shut at the end of the First Age--these are synonyms for the Hell of Catholic and Christian theological thought. Even if Tolkien has not retained the name, one senses he has retained the concept because the premise of a Supreme Being seems to demand it.

The second unresolved question concerns the fate of Men in death. Tolkien leaves the impression that Elves and Men are separated in death, possibly forever. This difference in death has been decreed by Ilúvatar. Therefore, whereas Elves go to the Halls of Mandos with the possibility of returning to Earth again when they die, Men do not. Finrod, for example, says he goes to the Timeless Halls but will not be seen among the Noldor for a long time (179); later Finrod walks with Finarfin in Eldamar (176). Men, however, pass beyond the Circles of the World, but what happens to them after their stay in the Halls the Elves do not know (42, 104, 149). Only Mandos and Manwë know where they go (104); not all was foretold in the Music of the Ainur (104); Ilúvatar has not revealed all things that are to come, and many ages may pass before Ilúvatar's purpose is revealed to Men (265).

This separation between Elves and Men explains the poignancy of many of Tolkien's scenes in which Elves and Men die. Finrod, Elven king of Nargothrond, as he lies dying in the dungeons of Sauron, tells Beren the mortal that "it may be that we shall not meet a second time in death or life, for the fates of our kindred are apart" (174). Because Lúthien chooses to become mortal and marry Beren, the Maia Melian, wife of King Thingol, knows that "a parting beyond the end of the world had come between them" (188). Huor tells Turgon that "we part here for ever" (194), whereas Tuor his son, because he is permitted to sail to the Blessed Realm, is spared the fate of Men (245). Most poignant of all is the separation of Arwen and her father Elrond--"bitter was their parting that should endure beyond the ends of the world" (III, 316).

The question here is whether Tolkien believed that this separation was forever, or whether he believed Men and Elves would be reunited after

the End of the World. Tolkien is vague on this point, giving the impression, on the one hand, of eternal separation, and, on the other, the impression that under Ilúvatar there can be no separation. Ilúvatar, the Númenóreans are reminded, does not plant to no purpose, and the Valar tell the Elves that Men will join in the Second Music of the Ainur (42). Like the Númenóreans, the reader, too, must trust that Ilúvatar does plant with a purpose because such an eternal separation between Elves and Men seems to violate the overall tone of the work.

Chapter III

The Plan of Melkor

Despite his conviction as a Catholic that God's providential plan for Creation insured the eventual defeat of Satan, Tolkien did not deny what he knew by faith and his own experience to be the great power of evil in the world. According to Carpenter, he became resigned to living in such a world, worrying neither about where he lived nor about what clothes he wore. Resigned as he may have been, though, he did experience "bouts of profound despair" which Carpenter explains by reference to his belief that his mother had been taken away from him by the wickedness of the world. "More precisely, and more closely related to his mother's death, when he was in this mood, he had a deep sense of impending loss. Nothing was safe. Nothing would last. No battle would be won forever."[35] It is undoubtedly in this same mood that he wrote the pessimistic note to his son Christopher during the war: "The War is not over (and the one that is, or the part of it, has largely been lost). But it is of course wrong to fall into such a mood, for Wars are always lost, and The War always goes on; and it is no good growing faint."[36]

When one turns from Tolkien's life to his mythology and considers his treatment of evil in a world ruled by a Supreme Being, one senses that Tolkien was not only true to the Catholic belief in the power and pervasiveness of evil but also faithful to his own experience of living in a wicked world subject to the power of Satan. Despite his assurance that Ilúvatar will eventually defeat Melkor and his chief emissary Sauron, he

has not written a work that underestimates the terrible power of evil to corrupt and destroy. In Melkor and Sauron he has embodied all that he knew of Satan; like Satan, these are divine Beings who cause endless suffering and tragedy; so terrible does their power become that at times their triumph, rather than their defeat, seems inevitable.

The principal reason why their triumph seems inevitable is the fact that behind this endless suffering and tragedy of the Children of Ilúvatar works the "design" or "designs" of Melkor and Sauron by which they hope to attain the dominion of Middle-Earth and destroy the Children of Ilúvatar to whom it has been committed in the "design" of Ilúvatar (142, 150, 157, 191, 195, 241, 287; III, 63, 196). The basic means by which they achieve this "design"--by lies and deceit--identifies them with Satan, whom Christian and Catholic theologians have traditionally pictured as the Father of Lies. Their lies, sown like seed and wrapped in fair and cunning words and set about as whispers, work from the Beginning to divide and estrange the Children of Ilúvatar from the Valar and among themselves (50, 68, 82, 83, 85, 90, 101, 104, 109, 128, 141, 145, 156, 244, 255).

Perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this "design" is the constant warfare which these divine Beings and their emissaries wage against the Children of Ilúvatar during the Three Ages of Middle-Earth history. How terribly destructive these wars are is evidenced in two ways. The five battles of the Wars of Beleriand in the First Age leave nearly every major character of The Silmarillion dead, and, of those who do survive these bloody wars, several are killed in the Second Age warring against Sauron. So fundamental is the sense of the utter defeat of good before evil that the theme Tolkien ascribes to Beowulf apllies equally well to The Silmarillion--"life is transitory; light and life hasten away." It

is because of this overwhelming darkness that the tale of Beren and Lúthien is one of only the few tales of the First Age that speaks of light and joy: "Among the tales of sorrow and ruin that come down to us from the darkness of those days there are yet some in which amid weeping there is joy and under the shadow of death light that endures" (162). The power of darkness to nearly destroy the "design" of Iluvatar is best understood, however, by realizing how it affects Aragorn, crowned King at the end of The Lord of the Rings. Judged by any other standard than providential, his crowning is mere luck, for he descends from Eärendil, who himself descends from the union of two Houses, the elvish, Noldorian House of Finwë, and the mortal House of Hador of Dor-Lómin. Both of these Houses are nearly annihilated by Melkor. Out of the twenty-four major characters of the House of Finwë, only four survive beyond the First Age, and only Galadriel survives into the Third Age to play a role in The Lord of the Rings. Of the nine major characters from the House of Hador, seven die, three of whom--Túrin, his sister Nienor, and their father, Húrin--commit suicide when they learn that they have been cruelly tricked by Melkor. Eärendil and his son Elros, from whom Aragorn descends in unbroken line through Isildur, narrowly escape death themselves.

While the deaths of twenty-seven characters out of thirty-three indicate the great power of Melkor and Sauron, they also point out a recurrent theme in Tolkien--wars against these vastly superior divine Beings are ultimately hopeless when trust is placed in arms alone. Such dependence on arms alone, he notes with pessimism before he even chronicles the disastrous outcome of the wars against Melkor, cannot destroy either Melkor or Sauron; indeed, the many heroic deaths of the Elves and their allies, Mortal Men, in the great wars of the First Age seem almost as

futile and meaningless as the heroic deaths of Germanic warriors like Beowulf who die nobly yet with the knowledge that their victory over evil is of no lasting value since it is only temporary.

> But the dawn is brief and the day often belies its promise; and now the time drew on to the great wars of the powers of the North, when the Noldor and Sindar and Men strove against the hosts of Morgoth Bauglir, and went down in ruin. To this end the cunning lies of Morgoth that he sowed of old, and sowed ever anew among his foes, and the curse that came of the slaying at Alqualondë, and the oath of Fëanor, were ever at work. Only a part is here told of the deeds of those days, and most is said of the Noldor, and the Silmarils, and the mortals that became entangled in their fate. (104)

Gandalf is wise enough to realize this fact, for he echoes this sentiment when he tells the Captains of the West, as they debate their final move against Sauron, that their war against him is without final hope (III, 189). Tragically, Fëanor, Fingolfin, Maedhros, and Boromir ignore this fact, and their reliance on arms alone leads directly to their deaths.

Another obvious manifestation of the "design" of Melkor and Sauron is that the First and Second Children of Ilúvatar, the Eldar and Mortal Men, become so estranged that by the end of the Third Age fear and suspicion exist between them. The beginnings of this estrangement go back to the First Age when Melkor uses lies to estrange them (141); although this strategy is slow to ripen (142), it eventually works because Melkor enlists the aid of Swarthy Men from the East (157) who betray the Eldar and Men to the disastrous defeat of the fifth battle in the Wars of Beleriand, Nirnaeth Arnoediad (193). Because of this betrayal, "fear and hatred were aroused among those that should have been united" and "the hearts of Elves were estranged from Men, save only those of the Three Houses of the Edain" (195). Yet even these Men become estranged from the Eldar in time so that, after Elendil's day, it is said, the two kindreds became estranged

(295). Two conversations in The Lord of the Rings speak about this. When the hobbits encounter Gildor and his company of elves and realize that they are High-Elves (I, 117), Gildor tells them that because the Elves have their own labors and sorrows, they are little concerned with other creatures on earth (I, 123-24). Still later, when Sam asks Faramir, Captain of Gondor, what he knows about Elves, Faramir speaks about the fear and suspicion that exist between them.

> . . .there you touch upon another point in which we have changed, declining from Númenor to Middle-Earth. For as you may know, if Mithrandir was your companion and you have spoken with Elrond, the Edain, the Fathers of the Númenóreans, fought beside the Elves in the first wars, and were awarded by the gift of the kingdom in the midst of the Sea, within sight of Elvenhome. But in Middle-Earth Men and Elves became estranged in the days of darkness, by the arts of the Enemy, and by slow changes of time in which each kind walked further down their sundered roads. Men now fear and misdoubt the Elves, and yet know little of them. (II, 365)

It is precisely this very fear that explains why the mortal warriors, Éomer and Boromir, Faramir's brother, shudder at the name of Lothlórien, one of the three remaining strongholds of Elves in the Third Age; for them it is a place of magic or sorcery (I, 439; II, 42).

The fear and suspicion that divide Mortal Men and Elves is more poisonous, however, because it affects other peoples as well. Because of his appearance, Aragorn is viewed suspiciously by the hobbits when they first meet him at Bree; only the letter of Gandalf persuades them otherwise. Gandalf himself is viewed with suspicion and distrust by Denethor, Steward of Gondor, and Théoden, King of Rohan. Gimli the dwarf obstinately refuses to be blindfolded as he enters Lothlórien; that refusal prompts Haldir the elf to comment that in nothing more is the power of Sauron more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him (I, 451). For the same dwarfish obstinancy Gandalf

had chided Gimli's father, Gloin, when Gloin, upon hearing that Gollum had escaped from the elves, reacted by recalling memories of his own capture and imprisonment by wood-elves years before on his journey with Bilbo to recover the dwarf treasure from Smaug (I, 335). One may as well abandon the Council of Elrond, Gandalf warns, and, by implication, any hope of defeating Sauron if such an attitude of fear and suspicion is continually stirred up. Clearly, then, the road to victory is to set aside differences, even if this requires forgetting such bloody memories as the treacherous betrayal of Turin and his companions by Mîm the dwarf (206) or the murder of Thingol, High King of the Sindarian Elves, by dwarves, which had led to the eventual collapse of the elvish kingdom of Doriath (233). Laughter from Mordor will be their only reward, Gandalf reminds Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, if they argue with the guards of Théoden when demand is made that they lay their weapons aside before being admitted to the King (II, 147). Gandalf is simply putting in other terms his earlier warning at the Council of Elrond that their greatest foe is treason (I, 329), yet this warning and Galadriel's later counsel to the Fellowship that "hope remains while all the Company is true" (I, 462) cannot stop Boromir; because he chooses to rely on the strength of Gondor alone, he splits the Fellowship.

While this brief description of the more obvious manifestations of evil proves the malice of Melkor and Sauron, it does not adequately convey the depth of their malice and hatred for the First and Second Children of Ilúvatar. That can only be suggested by carefully studying how their plan very nearly destroys the Edain, those Mortal Men allied with the Eldar, and the Elvish peoples known as the Noldor.

Almost immediately after the arrival of Men in Beleriand, some

three hundred years after the landing of the Noldor on the shores of Middle-Earth, strife and dissension awake among Men "in which the shadow of Morgoth may be discerned" (144). The leaders of the discontent, Bereg and Amlach, discount the power and even the existence of Melkor by voicing the lie that it is the Eldar, not Melkor, who seek the dominion of Middle-Earth. Amlach later denies uttering this lie; yet his denial does not prevent the split among Men, for Bereg and his followers refuse to involve themselves further in what they consider a quarrel between Melkor and the Eldar; they scorn the idea that they were brought to Beleriand to aid the Eldar against Morgoth (144), leave Beleriand and become forgotten (144). Those who stay, like Amlach, are Elf-friends who believe that there is a Dark Lord, a Master of Lies, who sends spies and emissaries among them. Centuries later, the descendants of these Mortal Men, the Númenóreans, are divided among themselves in their island-kingdom of Númenor. There Sauron destroys the kingdom by feigning friendship and persuading King Ar-Pharazôn that Ilúvatar is a phantom devised by the Valar and that the real master is Melkor, the Giver of Freedom. These lies lead Ar-Pharazôn and his followers to begin killing those Númenóreans who remain faithful to the Valar and to the Eldar; eventually, Númenor is destroyed by Ilúvatar Himself (273-74).

It is against the Eldar, and particularly the Noldor, that Melkor and Sauron most direct their malice, however. Ever jealous that the Valar war against him to help the Eldar (66), Melkor has undying hate for the First Children of Ilúvatar. Shortly after their arrival in the Blessed Realm, therefore, he begins by plotting the destruction of the Eldar by feigning friendship and carefully sowing lies (69). Because of the pride and greed of Fëanor, first son of Finwë, the lies are believed. Melkor

whispers that the second son of Finwë, Fingolfin, is plotting to usurp the leadership of the House of Finwë with the approval of the Valar because Fëanor will not commit to the Valar the three fabulous jewels, the Silmarils, which he has created (69). This lie splits the House of Finwë and erupts in the rebellion of Fëanor; he is banished for drawing a sword against his half-brother Fingolfin and his father Finwë follows him into exile. When Melkor steals the Silmarils shortly afterwards, killing Finwë, Fëanor blames the Valar and tries to persuade the Noldor that the Valar hold them in cages. His greed for the Silmarils leads him to swear a terrible oath which dooms the Noldor (83). This oath, sworn by Fëanor and his seven sons, binds them to pursue anyone--friend or foe--who possesses the Silmarils. So deep is the rift that is caused by the oath that Melkor has merely to wait upon oath and lie to destroy the Noldor (244).

To fulfill this oath, Fëanor persuades the greater part of the Noldor to forsake the Blessed Realm in order to follow Melkor to Middle-Earth and to regain the Silmarils by war; yet this rebellion is doomed almost immediately because it causes the Noldor to attack and kill fellow-elves to escape the Blessed Realm. To cross the waters that divide Middle-Earth from the Blessed Realm, Fëanor needs ships, and when the Teleri, the elves of Alqualondë, refuse him these needed ships, Fëanor decides to take them by force. This murderous attack against the peaceful and essentially defenseless Teleri, the Kinslaying (87), brings upon the Noldor the wrath and judgment of the Valar. Shortly after the attack, Mandos, the herald of Manwë and Doomsman of the Valar (28), pronounces the judgment known as the Prophecy of the North and the Doom of the Noldor.

Tears unnumbered ye shall shed; and the Valar will fence

> Valinor against you, and shut you out, so that not even the echo of your lamentation shall pass over the mountains. On the House of Fëanor the wrath of the Valar lieth from the West to the uttermost East, and upon all that will follow them it shall be laid also. Their Oath shall drive them, and yet betray them, and ever snatch away the very treasures that they have sworn to pursue. To evil end shall all things turn that they begin well; and by treason of kin unto kin, and the fear of treason, shall this come to pass. The Dispossessed shall they be for ever. . . . (88)

From this perspective, The Silmarillion is the tragic history of how this prophecy works slowly but inextricably to fulfillment after the Noldor have occupied Beleriand for some five hundred years. Escape from this curse can only come from the Valar. Three times attempt is made to gain this forgiveness from the Valar--twice Turgon, King of Gondolin, builds ships which he sends west to Valinor (159, 196), and once the Vala Ulmo pleads himself for Elves and Men (244); but the "hour" of forgiveness does not come until Eärendil is born. When he takes upon himself the peril of seeking pardon for both races, his prayer is granted (248-49); then the Valar launch the Great Battle, the War of Wrath, in which Melkor is cast down in ruin (251) and the curse of the Noldor is lifted.

The Kinslaying and the curse it calls upon the Noldor works directly in two ways to destroy and divide the Elves of Beleriand. First of all, Fëanor and his sons create a bloody tale of treachery and betrayal. The "firstfruits" of the Kinslaying and the Doom of the Noldor is Fëanor's decision to abandon Fingolfin and his people in Valinor because there are not enough ships to ferry all the Noldor to Middle-Earth (90). When Fëanor reaches Middle-Earth, he has the ships burned. Fingolfin and his people are therefore forced either to turn back in shame or to cross a deadly stretch of icy land that links Valinor and Middle-Earth. They decide to cross, but in that crossing perish many Noldor, including Elenwë,

the wife of Turgon (90, 134). Next, the oath "drives" the sons of Fëanor to kidnapping and attempted murder. When Beren seeks the aid of Finrod Felagund, King of Nargothrond, in his quest to steal one of the Silmarils from Morgoth, Finrod tells him that "the sons of Fëanor would lay all the Elf-kingdoms in ruin rather than suffer any other than themselves to win or possess a Silmaril, for the Oath drives them" (169). Subsequent events bear this out, for Celegorm and Curufin plot to become the mightiest princes of the Noldor; to this end, they kidnap Lúthien, the daughter of Thingol, and later attempt to kill both Beren and Lúthien (173, 177). Worst of all, however, the oath "drives" the sons of Fëanor to murder fellow-elves because these peoples possess the Silmaril that Beren eventually steals from Morgoth. When the sons of Fëanor learn that Dior receives the Silmaril from his father and mother, Beren and Lúthien, upon their deaths, Celegorm stirs up his brothers to attack Dior. In this attack are killed three of Fëanor's sons, Celegorm, Curufin, and Caranthir, but the kingdom of Doriath is destroyed with the deaths of Dior and his wife Nimloth; their two sons, Eluréd and Elurín, are seized by the servants of Celegorm and left to starve in a forest. Yet, in fulfillment of the Prophecy that the oath will snatch away the very treasures that they have sworn to pursue, the attack is unsuccessful because the Silmaril eludes them. Elwing, Dior's daughter, escapes with it and flees to the mouths of the River Sirion by the sea (236-37). In time, the survivors of Gondolin join Elwing and her people (244), and Eärendil and Elwing marry, to whom are born Elrond and Elros (246). Tormented by their unfulfilled oath, the sons of Fëanor attack and destroy these survivors while Eärendil is away. Amrod and Amras, sons of Fëanor, are killed, while Elwing attempts to commit suicide but is saved by the Vala Ulmo. Only the pity of Maglor,

another son of Fëanor, saves Elrond and Elros from almost certain death. Again, however, the Silmaril escapes with Elwing, for Ulmo brings her to Eärendil (247). Eventually Eärendil, wearing the Silmaril upon his brow, brings it to the Blessed Realm (248). There he is transformed into the Evening Star, to be sent sailing through the sky with the Silmaril upon his brow (250).

The bloody tale of the sons of Fëanor finds its conclusion in the deaths of the only remaining sons, Maedhros and Maglor. After the defeat of Melkor in the Great Battle, they plot to possess the other two Silmarils and divide them between them. They steal into the camp of Eönwë and kill the guards for these jewels; Eönwë refuses to kill them when they are captured but lets them freely depart. The Silmarils, however, cause them pain and these remaining sons of Fëanor are lost in time--apparently by suicide (253-54).

Besides driving the sons of Fëanor to treachery and murder, the oath works directly in a second way to poison the relations between the Noldor and other elves so that any united front against Melkor is virtually impossible. What Thingol learns about the coming of the Noldor is only half-truth and lies whispered by Morgoth (128) because the Noldor do not speak openly about why they have come to Middle-Earth. For this reason, Thingol forbids the use of the Noldorian tongue, commanding that "all such as use it shall be held slayers of kin and betrayers of kin unrepentant" (129). Later, because they kidnap and hold his daughter, Thingol considers going to war against the kingdom of Nargothrond where the sons of Fëanor then reside. It is against such division that any united front against Melkor is doomed; that is why he can laugh when he sees that the sons of Fingolfin and the sons of Fëanor cannot unite against him (109).

Maedhros does realize the need to unite, but his plans to attack Melkor merely end in the disastrous defeat known as Nirnaeth Arnoediad, Unnumbered Tears, the name of which recalls the Prophecy of the North and the Doom of the Noldor that "tears unnumbered ye shall shed."

> In those days Maedhros son of Fëanor lifted up his heart, perceiving that Morgoth was not unassailable; for the deeds of Beren and Lúthien were sung in many songs throughout Beleriand. Yet Morgoth would destroy them all, one by one, if they could not again unite, and make new league and common council; and he began those counsels for the raising of the fortunes of the Eldar that are called the Union of Maedhros.
>
> Yet the oath of Fëanor and the evil deeds that it had wroughts did injury to the design of M aedhros, and he had less aid than should have been. Orodreth would not march forth at the word of any son of Fëanor, because of the deeds of Celegorm and Curufin. . . .From Doriath came little help. For Maedhros and his brothers, being constrained by their oath, had before sent to Thingol and reminded him with haughty words of their claim, summoning him to yield the Silmaril, or become their enemy. . .but the words of the sons of Fëanor were proud and threatening, and Thingol was filled with anger, thinking of the anguish of Lúthien and the blood of Beren whereby the jewel had been won, despite the malice of Celegorm and Curufin. . . .Therefore he sent back the messengers with scornful words. Maedhros made no answer, for he had now begun to devise the union of the Elves; but Celegorm and Curufin vowed openly to slay Thingol and destroy his people, if they came victorious from war, and the jewel were not surrendered of free will. (188-89)

While the Kinslaying and the Prophecy of the North work directly to destroy and divide the elves of Beleriand, their greatest evil is indirectly to destroy the city of Gondolin, the "last hope of the Noldor" and the one stronghold of resistance which Melkor eagerly seeks but cannot find. In fulfillment of the Prophecy that the doom of the Noldor will come about by "treason of kin unto kin, and the fear of treason," however, Melkor can bide his time, for the downfall of the city comes predictably through the treachery of an elf--Maeglin, the son of Eöl and Aredhel, the sister of Turgon, King of the City. He betrays the city to Melkor because he

is promised the lordship of the city as Melkor's vassal and possession of Idril, the daughter of Turgon (242). Of all the elves besides Fëanor, Maeglin most shares the Satanic qualities of Melkor. Like Fëanor and the fallen angels of Paradise Lost, his mind is bent to mining (134, 138, 242); his hot desire is like Fëanor's (64, 134); he is a thief (202). His coming to the city is "a dark seed of evil" that is "sown" (139). Even though he soon becomes one of the mightiest princes of the Noldor, proving fearless in battle against the hosts of Melkor in the battle of Nirnaeth Arnoediad, he desires more--nothing less than to possess Idril, Turgon's only heir (134, 241). This lust for her (139, 241) is described as "an evil fruit of the Kinslaying, whereby the shadow of the curse of Mandos fell upon the last hope of the Noldor" (139).

On first appearance, Maeglin's treachery may seem to be a minor subplot in Tolkien's history because his narrative deals only briefly with him. Yet because his life and treachery are carefully interwoven with the lives of certain mortal Men of the House of Hador of Dor-Lómin, his treachery forms one of the most significant events in Melkor's plan for the dominion of Middle-Earth. That the House of Hador has been especially chosen by the Valar to be the means by which the "last hope of the Noldor" will be saved is indicated in several ways. Turgon receives dreams and messages that he should treat the sons of this House well (158); shortly afterwards Thorondor the Eagle rescues Húrin and Huor, the grandsons of Hador, and brings them in secret to Gondolin (159). Maeglin scorns these mortals. Still later, Húrin and Huor sacrifice themselves at Nirnaeth Arnoediad to save Turgon; but before dying, Huor prophesies to Turgon that from their two Houses will rise a new star (194), a prophecy that Maeglin hears and does not forget (194). Thus, years later, when Tuor, son of Huor,

comes to Gondolin, under the protection of Ulmo and guided by an elf whom Ulmo had saved from a shipwreck for this very purpose, Turgon looks favorably upon him because "he perceived that the fate of the Noldor was wound with the one whom Ulmo had sent" (241). Seven years pass and Tuor marries Idril, to whom in time is born Eärendil, the "new star" whose coming his grandfather Huor had foretold. When Maeglin is soon captured by orcs and brought before Melkor, he purchases his life by agreeing to betray the city; his "desire for Idril and hatred for Tuor led Maeglin the easier to his treachery, the most infamous in all the histories of the Elder Days" (242). When Eärendil is seven years old, Melkor attacks Gondolin and destroys the city. In a scene reminiscent of the flight of Aeneas from the burning city of Troy, Tuor rescues his family from Maeglin by killing him (242-43). Thus, even though the Doom of the Noldor does bring about the fall of the city, the "last hope of the Noldor" is not entirely destroyed because Tuor, Idril and their son Eärendil escape, coming, in time, to join Elwing and her people at the mouths of the River Sirion (244).

Warfare against the Children of Ilúvatar and civil war among themselves, fear and suspicion for other peoples, and treason among themselves--these are the symptoms of the evil plan of Melkor and Sauron as it unfolds itself during the Three Ages of Middle-Earth history and works to destroy the Children of Ilúvatar and give the dominion of Middle-Earth to Melkor and Sauron. It is for these reasons that the triumph of evil seems inevitable. Yet if this triumph seems inevitable, it occurs because of the fact that the Children of Ilúvatar as well as Dwarves are themselves guilty for much of the evil that nearly destroys them. As a Catholic living in a fallen world, Tolkien knew by faith that the "mystery of evil" was not

the blind, overpowering fate of pagan literature--Germanic or classical--that doomed the Christian to sin; by his own sinful choice, man created such evil realities as war, dissension, and treason. Similarly in Middle-Earth, the Children of Ilúvatar create evil themselves. It is, for example, Thingol's own pride that entangles him and his kingdom in the curse of the Noldor. Thingol "wrought the doom of Doriath" and becomes "ensnared within the curse of Mandos" (167) when he stipulates that Beren can only marry Lúthien on the condition that Beren steal one of the Silmarils from Melkor and bring it to him. Similarly, because of pride, Turgon refuses to heed the warning of Ulmo about the approaching doom of Gondolin (125, 126, 240). The fate of the Noldor in Middle-Earth illustrates the same theme. If it seems that they are doomed, it is clear that they doom themselves by their own choices. The oath of Fëanor and the Kinslaying are but two examples; still another is contained in Tolkien's unfavorable references to their thirst for more knowledge, surely an allusion to a common theme that is best expressed in Faust. The implication is that the Noldor corrupt themselves through their own skills and pursuit of knowledge. Befriended by the Vala Aulë, " most like Melkor in thought and in powers" (27), they learn much from him (27, 39); "yet even greater was their thirst for more knowledge" (60). This thirst leads them to take delight in the hidden knowledge that Melkor can reveal to them (66); still later, it leads them to listen eagerly to Sauron in Eregion (287). It is surely not accidental that the two great banes of Middle-Earth--the Silmarils and the Great Rings--are created by the Noldorian genius Feanor and by his grandson Celebrimbor. In itself, the pursuit of knowledge is not evil; yet it ensnares the Noldor because they believe the lies of Melkor and Sauron. It is this very willingness to believe the lies of

Melkor and Sauron that damns both the Noldor and the Númenóreans and leads to the two most disastrous events of Middle-Earth history--the rebellions of both these peoples against the Valar. From these two rebellions stem many of the evils that nearly destroy them, for their rebellions are similar to the Original Sin of Adam and Eve from which Christian theologians trace the host of evils that plague this fallen world.

Tolkien's Creation account, unlike the Creation account of the Yahwist (Genesis 2:4-3:24), does not contain a story about a primal fall in which a man and a woman, representing mankind, sin against their Creator and are then banished from a garden or paradise. Yet the rebellions of both the Noldor and the Númenóreans are so similar in details and effect that he surely wants one to see a general parallel between their falls and the fall of the man and the woman.

One can begin by noting the parallel between the motives of Melkor and Sauron and the Tempter of the biblical account whom Christian exegetes have always identified as the Devil or Satan. In each case, the Tempter intends to destroy the friendship and harmony that exist between the Creator and the created. From the very first, Melkor causes the elves to distrust the Valar; the first appearance of the Vala Oromë causes many elves fear (49). Later, when he walks among the Noldor in the Blessed Realm, he so lusts for the Silmarils that he intends to destroy Fëanor and end the friendship between the Eldar and the Valar by spreading whispering lies that divide the House of Finwë (67). Sauron succeeds in destroying the friendship between the Númenóreans and the Valar by persuading King Ar-Pharazôn, twenty-fourth King, that the Valar have deceived them by claiming that Ilúvatar is Lord; rather Ilúvatar is a phantom by which the Valar

enchain Men; Darkness alone is worshipful, and the Lord of Darkness is Melkor (271-72). Even before this, however, during the reigns of King Tar-Ciryatan, thirteenth King, and his son, Tar-Atanamir, after Númenor had endured for more than two thousand years, the shadow of Morgoth himself was at work, destroying the friendship between the Númenóreans and the Valar by causing them to question Iluvatar's decree about the death of Men and, more significantly, about the Valar's Ban that forbade Men to sail West to seek the Blessed Realm (263-64). Why Melkor and Sauron intend to destroy the harmony between the Creator and the created is simple. Like Satan, they are motivated by hate and jealousy; just as Milton imagines and pictures Satan stirred to hate and jealousy when he sees the beauty of Adam and Eve in Paradise, so too are Tolkien's Melkor and Sauron stirred to hate and jealousy (36, 65, 271).

Another parallel between Tolkien's tale of history and the biblical account involves the nature of the temptation. In each case, the temptation involves the question of freedom. Adam and Eve are told that they will become like gods if only they eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Melkor's lies to the Noldor conjure up "visions" of "the mighty realms that they could have ruled at their own will, in power and freedom in the East" (68). Added to this are two other lies--that the Eldar have been brought to the Blessed Realm because the Valar fear they will become too great to govern and that they are held captive so that Men can supplant them in the kingdoms of Middle-Earth (68). Fëanor unwittingly and tragically echoes these lies when it seems to him, from his selfish point of view, that the Valar plot against him to gain the Silmarils which he has created. He speaks of the Noldor's "thraldom" (69), of being "cooped. . .in a narrow land" (82), of "freedom" and "great realms"

the Noldor will find if only they leave the Blessed Realm (83, 85), and of the "cages of the Valar" (90). Similarly, Sauron tempts Ar-Pharazôn and the Númenóreans with the thought that in the East and even in the West where they have been forbidden to sail by the Ban of the Valar are many lands for their winning which Melkor, the true Lord and Giver of Freedom, will grant them (271-72). Only Melkor can deliver the Númenóreans from the "servitude" of the Valar (271). Eve, Fëanor, and Ar-Pharazôn, the tempters whisper, have only to exercise the power within their own grasp to escape the oppression of the Creator who fears them because they may become too powerful.

Before such temptation the Noldor and Númenóreans fall because, like Satan, they are filled with pride (68, 265) and begin to murmur against the Valar (68, 264; III, Appendix A, 390). As the biblical Pharaoh hardens his heart against God (Exodus 11: 10; see also Psalm 95), so do Fëanor, Ar-Pharazôn and the Númenóreans harden their hearts against the Valar (88, 267, 277, 278). As Christian theologians speculate that the greater part of the angels fell with Satan, the hearts of most of these two peoples are corrupted by the lies of Melkor and Sauron (84; III, Appendix A, 388; 265, 269, 290, 293; III, Appendix A, 392). Just as theologians consider the sin of Adam and Eve rebellion, so too does Tolkien describe the actions of the Noldor and Númenóreans rebellion (69, 82, 86, 170, 264, 267; III, Appendix A, 392). Finally, as the Yahwist's story of the origin of evil shows that an immediate effect of the rebellion of Adam and Eve is the murder of Abel, so do these rebellions lead to fratricide in the killing of fellow-elves in the Kinslaying and in the murder of the Elendili, those Númenóreans who remain faithful to the Valar and Eldar.

In the Christian and Catholic notion of history, the Original Sin

of Adam and Eve marks a dramatic turning point in the history of God's relationship with man. From thenceforth, Adam and Eve and their descendants are alienated from God and live, not in the Paradise that God intended, but under the "shadow of death," a theological metaphor for a fallen world characterized by sin, death, fear, suspicion and treason. So sinful does man become that God destroys mankind with a great flood. Even after this flood, the effects of the Original Sin continue, and history becomes a long recital of more sin and failure. For Tolkien's Middle-Earth, the rebellions of the Noldor and the Númenóreans are also decisive turning points that mark the beginning of estrangement between Ilúvatar and his creatures. The Noldor lie under the wrath of the Valar, and all but a remnant of the Númenóreans are destroyed by Ilúvatar in a cataclysmic deluge that parallels the biblical flood of Genesis (278-79; III, Appendix A, 392). Middle-Earth is a fallen world which lies under the "shadow of death," where after the fall of Númenor, there is no place where the memory of a time without evil is preserved (279).

Yet any final conclusion about the power of evil in Middle-Earth must end where it begins--with Tolkien's deeply felt conviction that Evil is ultimately less powerful than Good despite the "design" of Melkor and despite the fact that creatures so cooperate with him that he has only to wait upon oath and lie to advance this "design" (244). In line with Catholic theology's belief that Original Sin is an event from which God brings forth good out of evil by sending Jesus, the Second Adam, who restores the lost relationship between God and man, Tolkien believes that Middle-Earth is also to be redeemed in time. The careful intricate working out of this redemption is the plan or "design" of Ilúvatar, and it forms the most important element of unity between The Silmarillion and the trilogy.

Chapter IV

The Triumph of Ilúvatar

Despite the fact that Ilúvatar seems to disappear in Tolkien's mythology after the Creation of the World, His absence is more apparent than real. His continuing activity in Middle-Earth is evidenced in three ways by which he thwarts the evil "design" of Melkor to gain the dominion of Middle-Earth. In The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings, therefore, the Children of Ilúvatar, the Eldar and the Edain, are never finally defeated because, time after time, almost miraculously, help comes beyond hope, a remnant is saved or remains faithful, and good is worked out of evil. Before drawing conclusions about Tolkien's use of these themes, it will be helpful to examine how they fit into his overall work.

Given the nature of Ilúvatar's supreme power, it should not be surprising to find that Melkor's most destructive act--the destruction of the Two Trees of the Blessed Realm--calls forth a response that becomes like a refrain or motif throughout Middle-Earth history. For "even as hope failed," Telperion and Laurelin bore one last flower and one last fruit, and these were preserved in the Sun and the Moon. This refrain and its variants are used for many key episodes in Tolkien's work and serve as a reminder that when all seems lost or beyond all hope, hope returns.

In The Silmarillion the Vala Ulmo promises Turgon, King of Gondolin, that although Gondolin must eventually fall, "beyond ruin and fire hope shall be born for Elves and Men" (126). Because of this prophecy, certain events take place which insure that "beyond hope" this prophecy will be

fulfilled. Essential for its fulfillment is the marriage of Beren and Lúthien, for from them comes Dior, the father of Elwing, the wife of Eärendil and mother of Elrond and Elros. Hence, Lúthien is said to return to Beren "beyond his hope" (166), and "beyond hope" they succeed in stealing a Silmaril from Melkor (236). "Beyond hope" the mortal Túrin rises to fight against Melkor, thus gaining time for the kingdoms of Middle-Earth. Finally, even though Gondolin is destroyed, Tuor, Idril, and their son Eärendil escape "beyond hope" (243), thus insuring that Eärendil will marry Elwing and then fulfill the task he was born for, the journey to the Blessed Realm to gain forgiveness for Elves and Men, a task "beyond hope" (249). Once that is accomplished, Melkor is overthrown and his captives in Angband are released "beyond all hope" (252).

The same formula is found in The Lord of the Rings. Boromir tells Aragorn that the Sword of Elendil would be help beyond their hope (I, 325), and this is proven when the Fellowship escapes from Moria, an escape that seemed beyond hope because Gandalf was killed there by a Balrog (I, 430, 460). And yet Gandalf returns to life and meets Aragorn again beyond all hope (II, 125). Similarly, when it seems that Frodo and Sam are trapped beyond all hope of escape in Shelob's lair, they are saved by using the phial of Eärendil (II, 419). Beyond hope, the sun shines again during the final darkness in the war against Sauron (III, 314); the Witch-King is killed beyond hope (III, 161), and, finally, hope beyond hope is fulfilled with the fall of Sauron (III, Appendix A, 426). While there are other uses of this formula, one need not give an exhaustive list since these references suggest the importance of this motif.

Evil is secondly thwarted by the fact that again and again a remnant of people is saved or a remnant remains faithful to the Valar. The terrible

battle of Unnumbered Tears serves as an example. In this battle is nearly killed Turgon, but he escapes because the remnant of the House of Hador sacrifices itself so that he can escape. How important that sacrifice is becomes evident when one remembers that their deaths insure the fulfillment of Ulmo's prophecy that the last hope of Elves and Men will spring from Gondolin. The point of this theme is that neither Melkor nor Sauron can ever wholly destroy all the Children of Ilúvatar. Two other important remnants that escape death are the survivors of the kingdoms of Doriath and Gondolin--Elwing and her people and Tuor and his people. From these remnants spring Elrond and Elros, from whom in turn will come those remnants of Elves and Men who fight against Sauron in the Third Age. Thus, when the majority of the Númenóreans, the descendants of Elros, are destroyed by Ilúvatar, a remnant, the Elendili, is saved and cast upon the shores of Middle-Earth to join the remnants of Elves at Lindon and at Imladris. Eventually from these remnants will come Aragorn who traces his descent from the last remnant of the race of Kings in the north (I, 291).

Ilúvatar thwarts the power of Melkor and Sauron finally because He has the power to bring forth good out of evil. Melkor knows this from the beginning, for Ilúvatar tells him that he will find that the secret thoughts of his mind are but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory (17). Of Men, even though they cause grief and stray, Ilúvatar says that in time they will find that all they do redounds at the end only to the glory of His work (42). Similarly, Manwë knows that the evil caused by Fëanor's rebellion against the Valar will be turned to good (98). This theme is seen in various ways but usually assumes a typical form--a course of events that is evil ironically leads to something good. Even though,

for instance, the Noldor return to Middle-Earth out of greed to regain the Silmarils, they do help Thingol and his people; without that aid, he might well have been destroyed. The most dramatic examples occur, however, in The Lord of the Rings. When Frodo finds Faramir, his discovery, in his own words, is turning good out of evil (II, 385). The witch-king is destroyed by a sword taken from the evil Barrow-Downs. Most ironically Gollum does indeed fulfill Gandalf's feeling that good can come from his probable treachery (III, 108).

The repetition of these three themes in Tolkien's work leads one to the inevitable conclusion that Ilúvatar is actively present in Middle-Earth though He remains unseen. What is more important to realize, however, is that this divine activity, like Melkor's, is not aimless; rather the divine aid which one sees continually aims at insuring that the dominion of Middle-Earth passes from the Eldar to Mortal Men to whom it is promised in the vision of Ilúvatar. That purpose seems proven by the fact that almost all instances of providential aid concern the line of Kings from whom Aragorn eventually springs. This line of Kings--the line of Lúthien--both Aragorn and Legolas say will never fail (I, 261; III, 187), but it is clear it could have failed at any moment without divine intervention protecting its members.

As the plan is worked out in Middle-Earth, it involves the intermarriages of four Houses and their offspring--the Elvish Houses of Finwë, High King of the Noldor, and Thingol, King of the Sindarian elves; and the Houses of the Edain, Bëor and Hador. By carefully following the fortunes of the chief characters of these Houses, one can better understand their relationships.

The House of Finwë is involved in the plan because of the appearances

and dreams of the Vala Ulmo to Turgon; shortly after arriving in Middle-Earth, Turgon receives orders from Ulmo to prepare a fortress, the hidden kingdom of Gondolin; this kingdom will last the longest of the Elvish kingdoms though it too will fall because the true hope of the Elves lies in the West, not in Middle-Earth (114-15, 125-26). Turgon is also told to treat the sons of the House of Hador well, for help will come from Huor and Húrin (158). For this reason, Ulmo sends eagles to save Huor and Húrin when they are lost in a battle (158) and to bring them to Gondolin. Years later when Huor faces certain death in the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, he prophesies to Turgon that from their two Houses a new star will rise (194). This prophecy and its importance becomes clear with subsequent events, for Huor's son, Tuor, becomes the instrument of the Vala Ulmo so that the prophecy is fulfilled. When he is a grown man, Ulmo "sets it in his heart" to leave his homeland and seek Nervast, Turgon's former dwelling; there he finds a sword and armor left behind by Turgon at the command of Ulmo; there too he meets the elf Voronwë whom Ulmo had saved from a shipwreck for the sole purpose of guiding Tuor to Gondolin (196, 238, 239). By the power of Ulmo they both reach Gondolin, and seven years later Tuor the mortal marries Idril the elven daughter of Turgon. From this union springs the "new star" Huor had prophesied would come from these two Houses, for their son is Eärendil, who will eventually reach the Blessed Realm, gain forgiveness for the Eldar and Mortal Men, and be transformed into a star, the planet Venus or the Evening Star.

The marriage of Eärendil to Elwing explains why the other two Houses are protected by divine aid. Like Turgon, Thingol has an only daughter, Lúthien, who marries a mortal man, Beren, from the House of Bëor; their son is Dior, the father of Elwing. What is significant here is that

Beren is considered a chosen mortal. As Turgon had been warned by dreams to treat the mortal sons of the House of Hador well, so too is Thingol troubled by dreams about the coming of men (143-44). This foreboding fulfills his wife Melian's prophecy about a man of Bëor's House who is moved by great doom (144, 165). As it is put into Tuor's heart to leave his homeland, so too is Beren directed in his heart to seek the kingdom of Doriath (166). In their quest to steal the Silmaril, Beren and Lúthien are defended by divine aid (180), and they are saved by eagles (182). While this brief summary belies the complexity of their story, its brevity does bring into better focus their relationship with the Houses of Finwë and Hador. Their granddaughter Elwing will marry Eärendil, and from that marriage come Elrond and Elros, and Aragorn traces his descent directly to Elros through Isildur.

What one cannot forget is that these intermarriages take place against a background of almost unrelieved war and darkness. Time and time again, nearly every member of this line is threatened with death and yet somehow escapes. Elwing survives the destruction of Doriath only to be attacked by the sons of Fëanor; so too Eärendil escapes Gondolin; and so too escape his sons from certain death only because of the pity of one of the sons of Fëanor. Tolkien leaves no doubt that the death of any one of these members would have destroyed the line of Beren and Lúthien.

While Melkor is defeated at the end of The Silmarillion, evil is not, and, therefore, the line of Beren and Lúthien, as it continues down through the Kings of Númenor from Elros, the first King of Númenor, is nearly destroyed when Sauron brings about the destruction of Númenor. Yet once again a faithful remnant escapes from Númenor, and this remnant establishes powerful kingdoms in Middle-Earth known as Gondor and Arnor. Although

the northern kingdom eventually crumbles, the southern kingdom survives, even though its last King is killed by the chief of the Ringwraiths, and it is then ruled by a line of Stewards who rule in place of the Kings though they do not assume the titles of Kings. To all appearances, then, the line of Beren and Lúthien is wiped out by Sauron.

It is within this larger context that one can fully appreciate the important role of the hobbits in The Lord of the Rings. Very simply, it is the story about how they help bring about the return of a King from the line of Beren and Lúthien. The providential order that has insured the survival of this line through thousands of years works again, this time through the efforts of the Istar Gandalf, in reality a divine being who is condescendingly referred to as a wizard; yet providence works in another important way because without the destruction of the One Ruling Ring, Aragorn, the returning King, could never have reached the throne. As providence has chosen Tuor and Beren, so now it chooses the insignificant hobbits, who work, without realizing it, to forward Iluvatar's "design" by which Man, represented by Aragorn, finally receives the rightful "dominion" of Middle-Earth, while the Eldar pass into the Ancient West, their true home, never to return. For good or ill, Middle-Earth then belongs to Man. This bestowal of power is spoken of in the supplementary account of The Lord of the Rings entitled "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age":

> But when all things were done, and the Heir of Isildur had taken up the lordship of Men, and the dominion of the West had passed to him, then it was made plain that the power of the Three Rings also was ended, and to the Firstborn the world grew old and grey. In that time the last of the Noldor set sail from the Havens and left Middle-Earth forever. (304)

Aragorn's crowning and Sauron's defeat at the end of The Lord of

the Rings is paralleled by Eärendil's ascension as a star and Melkor's defeat at the end of The Silmarillion. This parallel seems more than incidental, however, for there are important references to Eärendil in the trilogy by which Tolkien establishes a very close link between Eärendil and Aragorn. The first reference to Eärendil comes shortly after Tom Bombadil rescues the hobbits from the Barrow-Downs. Speaking of the Men of Númenor, Westernesse, Tom says, "Few now remember them. . .yet still some go wandering, sons of forgotten kings walking in loneliness, guarding from evil things folk that are heedless." Immediately the hobbits have a "vision."

> The hobbits did not understand his words, but as he spoke they had a vision as it were of a great expanse of years behind them, like a vast shadowy plain over which there strode shapes of Men, tall and grim and bright with swords, and last came one with a star on his brow. Then the vision faded, and they were back in the sunlit world. (I, 201)

One naturally wonders why Tolkien chooses at this point in his story to allude to events of the ancient past, but this question is answered immediately because in the next chapter the hobbits meet Aragorn. Because he traces his descent back to the Men of Númenor, he is one of these "sons of forgotten kings." More importantly, however, Tolkien early establishes a link between Aragorn and the most important of mortal Men in that ancient past, Eärendil. Later at Rivendell, Aragorn even makes the identification between himself and Eärendil. Eärendil is the subject of a long song by Bilbo, and when Bilbo asks Aragorn for any suggestions, the only change he insists upon is to picture Eärendil with a "green stone" (I, 312); thus, in the song Eärendil is pictured wearing an emerald (I, 308); this change is apparently prompted by the fact that Aragorn himself wears a star on his breast (I, 313). During the War of the Ring, when Aragorn

comes to the Houses of Healing, he is wearing a "green stone" (III, 169). Another connection between these two concerns their names. When the peoples of Middle-Earth see the new star rise in the heavens, Eärendil transformed, they call it "Gil-Estel," "Star of High Hope" (250); similarly, Aragorn's mother predicts that her son may bring hope and calls him "Estel," "Hope" (III, Appendix A, 420, 426). A final parallel between the two is their willingness to suffer for the sake of others. Eärendil is willing to take the wrath of the Valar upon himself to gain the pardon of the Valar for the rebellious Noldor, while Aragorn says that as Isildur's heir he should labor to repair his fault (248; I, 330).

There is another connection between Aragorn and Eärendil, however, which is suggested by the origin of Eärendil's name, and to explore this connection and its implications is to discover a dramatic example of Tolkien's indebtedness to his Catholicism, whether consciously borrowed or not. To appreciate fully the significance of Eärendil in Tolkien's mythology, one must recall its source. According to Carpenter, while studying a group of Anglo-Saxon poems known as Crist by Cynewulf in the summer of 1913, Tolkien was forcibly struck by two lines of the poem:

> Eala Earendel engla beorhtast
> ofer middangeard monnum sended.[37]

Carpenter translates these lines as "Hail Earendel, brightest of angels/ above the middle-earth sent unto men," while Charles H. Whitman translates the address as "Lo! Thou Splendour of the dayspring, fairest of angels sent to men upon earth."[38] Regardless of the translation, what is more significant is that these two lines come from what A.S. Cook calls the "Antiphonal Passage," which, he says, was suggested by the antiphon sung in honor of Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah, the antiphon of the Magnificat

for December 21 in the Catholic Church's liturgy of the Hours, a prayer recited daily by Catholic priests, monks, and nuns.[39] The antiphons for the Magnificat during the week before Christmas are called the "O" antiphons, and the "O" antiphon for December 21 is, "O Oriens, Splendor lucis aeternae, et Sol justitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis," which can be translated, "O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death."

The obvious questions are whether Tolkien knew that these lines were suggested by the December 21 "O" antiphon, and whether, therefore, he identified Eärendil in his mythology with Jesus Christ. One can answer the first question by saying that Tolkien seems to know this antiphon because portions of it are found in his work. The phrase, "dwell in darkness," occurs when Tolkien describes the fate of Men under the shadow of Melkor in The Silmarillion: ". . .and Men dwelt in darkness and were troubled by many evil things that Morgoth had devised in the days of his dominion" (260). The phrase, "the shadow of death," appears when Tolkien says that the tale of Beren and Lúthien is a story "in which amid weeping there is joy and under the shadow of death light that endures" (162). To these can be added the fact that Eönwë, the herald of Manwë, greets Eärendil in similar terms when he reaches the Blessed Realm: "Hail, Eärendil, bearer of light before the Sun and Moon! Splendour of the Children of Earth, Star in the darkness, jewel in the sunset, radiant in the morning" (249).

The answer to the second question is that Tolkien did not identify Eärendil with Jesus Christ. According to Carpenter, while Tolkien believed that Earendel had originally been the name for Venus, he interpreted it as referring to John the Baptist.[40] The implications of this interpretation

are important, however, because Tolkien uses both ideas in his mythology. First, Eärendil is transformed by the Valar into a star, the planet Venus; more importantly, as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ, Eärendil becomes a forerunner of Aragorn. Thus, examining the origin of Eärendil's name leads one to conclude that Aragorn can be viewed in terms of Jesus Christ.

Viewing Aragorn in these terms is strengthened in other ways in The Lord of the Rings. First of all, Tolkien has chosen to relate Aragorn's restoration and Sauron's destruction to March 25, the day of the Ring's destruction but also the feastday of the Annunciation in the Catholic calendar. Hence, his restoration takes on added significance if one views it in terms of the Old Testament reading and responsorial psalm used in the liturgy of the Mass for that day. In that reading the prophet Isaiah proclaims the coming of the long-awaited Messiah, the Christ, God's Anointed One, who will come in power to usher in an age of lasting peace and prosperity; evil will be overthrown and a new age will begin. The responsorial psalm which follows this reading identifies the King with the House of David, for it speaks of the rod of Jesse, the father of King David, coming to blossom.

The conclusion that one may draw from viewing the crowning of Aragorn from this perspective is not that Aragorn "is" or "stands for" Jesus Christ. This would be to allegorize and, therefore, to misinterpret Tolkien. Rather, such a reading provides a parallel between the imaginary events of Tolkien's world and the events of Judaism and Christianity that Tolkien knew through his knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments. Aragorn is "like" the Messiah, then, and what he establishes for Middle-Earth is what the prophet Isaiah hoped God's Anointed One would establish

for Israel--a new beginning, a springtime for earth.

Other biblical ideas also strengthen this parallel between Aragorn and the Messiah. As the Messiah springs from what Isaiah called the "faithful remnant," so too does Aragorn spring from the remnants of Elves and Mortal Men who have remained faithful to the Valar. Secondly, while Tolkien's "Behold the King!" (III, 304) may or may not be a conscious echo of Pilate's "Ecce Homo," his description of the newly-crowned Aragorn as "ancient of days" (III, 314) seems almost certainly to derive from the Book of Daniel, which describes God in these terms (Daniel 7: 9, 13, 22). Finally, if for Isaiah the symbol of the birth of the Messiah was the rod of Jesse blossoming, for Tolkien the symbol of the return of the rightful King is the flowering once again of the White Tree, which is itself an image of the Two Trees planted in the Blessed Realm at the very beginnings of Middle-Earth history. In "Of the Rings" Tolkien writes about this.

> Then Sauron failed, and he was utterly vanquished and passed away like a shadow of malice; and the towers of Barad-dûr crumbled in ruin, and at the rumour of their fall many lands trembled. Thus peace came again, and a new Spring opened on earth; and the Heir of Isildur was crowned King of Gondor and Arnor, and the might of the Dúnedain was lifted up and their glory renewed. In the courts of Minas Arnor the White Tree flowered again, for a seedling was found by Mithrandir in the snows of Mindolluin that rose tall and white above the City of Gondor; and while it still grew there the Elder Days were not wholly forgotten in the hearts of the Kings. (304)

The image of the White Tree can also be related to the parable of the mustard seed. If for Jesus the miraculous growth of a tiny mustard seed was an apt symbol for the inevitable spread and triumph of the Kingdom of God, then for Tolkien the White Tree is a fitting symbol for the inevitable survival of the line of Beren and Lúthien. One should note that this parable immediately follows the parable which may have given Tolkien his image pattern about sowing, Matthew's parable about the wheat and

weeds (Matthew 13: 24-30).

Since the White Tree is obviously an important image, one should examine its history carefully. In The Silmarillion the eldest Tree in the Blessed Realm is Telperion; even though it is destroyed by Melkor and Ungoliant, its radiance is not wholly lost but preserved in the creation of the Moon. Yavanna replaces it with an image, the Tree of Tirion, Galathilion. From this Tree comes Nimloth, the Tree which the Eldar give Men in token for their help against Melkor. Nimloth grows and flourishes in Númenor until Sauron destroys it (273). Before it is destroyed, however, Isildur, son of Elendil, saves a seedling, and this seedling is carried to Middle-Earth after the fall of Númenor and planted in Minas Ithil before the House of Isildur. When Minas Ithil falls to Sauron, this Tree is destroyed; again, however, Isildur manages to save a seedling. This seedling gives Gondor the White Tree, a Tree that withers and dies during the Great Plague (III, Appendix B, 457). Another seedling is planted, but it too dies some twelve hundred years later, and no seedling can be found (III, Appendix B, 460). The dead Tree is left standing. Only at the end of The Lord of the Rings do Gandalf and Aragorn find another seedling (III, 308-309).

The importance of the Tree is indicated by the fact that Tolkien records its genealogy five times (59, 263, 291; I, 321; III, 308-309). It is well known in the lore of Gondor--Boromir tells the Council of Elrond that all know that Isildur planted it after defeating Sauron (I, 331). It is preserved in the rhyme about the seven stars that Gandalf recites to Pippin (II, 258; III, 27), and Aragorn's banner also bears the image of the White Tree as well as the seven stars (III, 150). That the Tree signifies the unfailing line of Kings of Beren and Lúthien is

found in the prophecy of King Tar-Palantir of Númenor who prophesies to the rebelling Númenóreans that once Nimloth withers, so too will wither the line of Númenórean kings (269). His prophecy is almost borne out when Sauron destroys Nimloth (273) and Númenor is destroyed. Yet the line of Kings remains unbroken because faithful Númenóreans, Elendil and his sons, Isildur and Anarion, escape to Middle-Earth. Thus it is said that the line of Lúthien will never fail (I, 261; III, 187). It is Gandalf who best summarizes the relationship between the Tree and the line of Beren and Lúthien. In reply to Aragorn's question of how a seedling has come to be there at the very edge of the snow--another image that is obviously symbolic--Gandalf answers:

> Verily this is a sapling of the line of Nimloth the fair; and that was a seedling of Galathilion, and that a fruit of Telperion of many names, Eldest of Trees. Who shall say how it comes here in the appointed hour? But this is an ancient hallow, and ere the kings failed or the Tree withered in the court, a fruit must have been set here. For it is said that, though the fruit of the Tree comes seldom to ripeness, yet the life within may then lie sleeping through many long years, and none can foretell the time in which it will awake. Remember this. For if ever a fruit ripens, it should be planted, lest the line die out of the world. Here it has lain hidden on the mountain, even as the race of Elendil lay hidden in the wastes of the North. Yet the line of Nimloth is older far than your line, King Elessar. (III, 308-309)

That the seedling is found in "the appointed hour" because of the power of Ilúvatar seems a foregone conclusion. So too is the conclusion that Aragorn is crowned King only because of the power of Ilúvatar to thwart the evil "design" of Melkor and Sauron to destroy the line of Beren and Lúthien; that fact Gandalf explicitly acknowledges as he places the crown on Aragorn. "Now come the days of the King, and may they be blessed while the thrones of the Valar endure" (III, 304). With this crowning is completed Ilúvatar's "design" by which Man, against all odds and beyond

all hope, receives the rightful dominion of Middle-Earth. Men receive a clean earth to till, and they begin their labors under the symbol of the Tree, "a memorial of the Eldar and of the light of Valinor" (291). Such a tremendously "happy ending" fulfills Tolkien's definition of a "true" fairy-story, for it denies universal final defeat and gives a glimpse of Joy.

Chapter V

Conclusions

If this study proves anything, it should prove that Tolkien's world of Middle-Earth can be better appreciated if one approaches The Silmarillion and The Lord of the Rings as one work and recognizes the numerous Catholic, Christian, and biblical ideas and allusions in this work. This becomes apparent when one considers again the stories of Beren and Lúthien and their descendants. Not only is their story the central tale of The Silmarillion, but it is the central story behind The Lord of the Rings because Aragorn traces his descent back to Beren and Lúthien, and his crowning comes about by a chain of events that suggests a providential plan similar to God's plan by which the Messiah is sent to redeem fallen man in this world.

Having said this, however, one still faces two problems. The first problem is that it is very difficult to isolate what is distinctly Catholic in Tolkien's work. What one may be tempted to identify as Catholic can in almost all cases be equally labeled Christian. If there is an explanation for this problem, it is that Tolkien himself saw no contradiction between the two terms. While, for example, he could tell Murray that the trilogy was a fundamentally Catholic work, he could also tell Kilby that he wrote from an essentially Christian viewpoint.[41] This is not to say there are no Catholic elements present; his use of March 25 and his probable familiarity with the "O" antiphons indicate this. It is to say, rather, that the term "Catholic" must be broad enough to

include Christian and biblical ideas as well, which he would have known through his attendance at Mass and through other devotional exercises.

The second problem lies within the work itself. The inevitable triumph of Ilúvatar is never really questioned in the mind of Tolkien, and this sense of inevitability is supported by many references to a future already known or to characters already doomed or fated. Such a heavy emphasis on doom seems, therefore, to deny a fundamental principle of both Catholicism and Christianity, the belief in the sacredness of individual free will. If there is a solution to this problem, that solution lies in recognizing that free will is a problem in Christianity and Catholicism, too, because it is a problem in Scripture itself. Free will seems denied in Tolkien because free will seems denied in Scripture. The Old Testament Jew, the Christian, the Catholic, each of these lives with the contradictory feeling that his life is guided by God and yet that he has some control of his life. Far more important for Tolkien apparently was his need to emphasize providence. Whether consciously borrowed or not, certain phrases and formulas from the New Testament abound in his work, suggesting that he likened himself to a biblical writer who writes history from a definite bias. Like the biblical writer who saw God continually in history, Tolkien cannot escape from the sense of providence in his world. The New Testament phrase, "And so it came to pass" or "And it came to pass" occurs some thirty-eight times; so too occurs the phrase, "In the fullness of time," found, for instance, in Paul's letter to Galatians.

If this emphasis on providence seems an imperfection in Tolkien's imaginary world, it must be noted and passed by. What one must conclude with is Tolkien's own awareness that myths were imperfect. Nonetheless,

this awareness was balanced by his conviction that, though his myths might be misguided, his mythology formed a "splintered fragment" that embodied a profound "truth" about the ultimate Reality which as a Catholic he identified as God. It is on how well he has presented this "splintered fragment" that he should be evaluated.

Notes

[1] Edmund Fuller, "The Lord of the Hobbits: J.R.R. Tolkien," in Tolkien and the Critics, eds. Neil D. Isaacs and Rose A. Zimbardo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 37.

[2] In a recent letter to the author (May 14, 1980), Carpenter writes: "It is not strictly true to say (p. 1) that 'readers now have the complete works of Tolkien'. Unfinished Tales, a new collection of short pieces related to The Silmarillion will be published in the autumn, and the edition of his letters at which Christopher Tolkien and I have been working will probably appear a year later. Even then, there will be other things to come. But it is true that nothing will appear which will contradict what is already in print, so your argument won't be affected by it."

[3] Clyde S. Kilby, Tolkien & The Silmarillion (Wheaton, Illinois: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1976), p. 22. Kilby quotes a letter which Tolkien wrote to W.H. Auden in which Tolkien says he wishes Auden would wait until The Silmarillion was published.

[4] Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977), p. 209. Tolkien makes the same point in a letter which he wrote to Sir Stanley Unwin in February 1950. Carpenter quotes the letter on page 209 of his biography.

[5] For the letter in which Tolkien describes The Silmarillion as his "private, beloved nonsense," see Carpenter, p. 184. See also p. 239.

[6] Carpenter, pp. 138-39. The address is reprinted in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 54-55.

[7] Carpenter, p. 207.

[8] Carpenter, pp. 106-107.

[9] Carpenter, p. 71. Of significance here is a personal letter which Kilby quotes, a letter Tolkien sent him on Christmas. In a footnote, he wrote: "I hope that perhaps this may reach you at or about Christmas. 'Lux fulgebat super nos. Eala Earendel engla beorhtast ofer middangeard monnum sended.' Cynewulf's words from which ultimately sprang the whole of my mythology." See Kilby, p. 57. The implication of this line is discussed in Chapter IV of the thesis.

[10] Carpenter, p. 97.

[11] Carpenter, pp. 145; 166.

[12] Carpenter, p. 207.

[13] Carpenter, p. 209.

[14] Carpenter, p. 210.

[15] Carpenter, p. 212. In a letter to the author (May 4, 1979), Carpenter says: "The long letter to Milton Waldman may be published in part in the forthcoming edition of Tolkien's letters, which will be published some time in the next two or three years. Until then, the Tolkien Estate will not make it available to anyone."

[16] Carpenter, p. 212.

[17] Because of the numerous references to both The Lord of the Rings and The Silmarillion, I have placed all page references to both works in the text of the thesis. I have used the paperback version of The Lord of the Rings (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965); the Roman numerals refer to the three separate volumes. For The Silmarillion, I have used the hardback edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977).

[18] Carpenter speaks briefly about "The New Shadow," pp. 27-28; in the letter cited above (May 4, 1979) he says: "'The New Shadow' is in existence, but is not available to researchers."

[19] Carpenter, pp. 91, 128.

[20] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," rpt. in The Tolkien Reader (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966), p. 73.

[21] Carpenter, p. 148.

[22] "On Fairy-Stories," p. 54.

[23] "On Fairy-Stories," p. 54.

[24] "On Fairy-Stories," p. 54. For Carpenter's version, see p. 190. His version opens with the following lines:

> The heart of man is not compound of lies,
> but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,
> and still recalls Him. Though now long estranged. . .

[25] Carpenter, p. 147.

[26] "On Fairy-Stories," p. 68.

[27] Fuller, p. 35.

[28] J.R.R. Tolkien and Donald Swann, The Road Goes Ever On (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967), pp. 65, 66.

[29] Carpenter, p. 93.

[30] Kilby, p. 59.

[31] Kilby, pp. 55-56.

[32] Robert Murray, S.J. "A Tribute to Tolkien," The Tablet (September 15, 1973), p. 880.

[33] In a letter to the author, Father Murray explains what he told Tolkien. "As for what concerns my letter to Tolkien, . . .I did not express the opinion that the trilogy. . .'contains references to grace and to the Virgin Mary'. That would be to suggest that it contains theological statements, which nobody could have thought. I meant that the work is bathed in an atmosphere suggesting the order of grace and that the female characters each in their way seem like reflections of Our Lady. . .As for the women characters, while I would not unsay what I said nearly 30 years ago, I am much more impressed now by their cardboard unreality and what this has suggested to many readers about Tolkien's own psychology,"

[34] Another possible reason he avoided such an explanation was because he feared his work would be misinterpreted as allegory. When, for instance, he sensed that Rayner Unwin was interpreting his work in this way, he wrote to Stanley Unwin to object (see Carpenter, pp. 202-203). Humphrey Carpenter puts the matter very clearly in a letter of September 9, 1978. "While there is no doubt that the writins of J.R.R. Tolkien are profoundly influenced by his Catholicism, it seems to me entirely mistaken to try to identify the characters in his stories with figures from Christian narrative. There may be authors who work in the fashion you suggest--consciously relating their own creations to known types and figures--but Tolkien was not one of them. This is not to say that you, as a researcher, may not be able to find some illuminating parallels; but they can be no more than in the nature of speculation. Even a highly detailed knowledge of Tolkien's working methods from conception to finished story would not, I think, reveal anything of the nature you seek. . .Among other things, Tolkien's Catholic beliefs were so profoundly held and so sacred to him that he would have thought it deeply irreverent to 'lift' particular items from it for narrative use, however important that narrative."

[35] Carpenter, pp. 31, 125.

[36] Carpenter, p. 200.

[37] Carpenter, p. 64.

[38] A.S. Cook, ed., Select Translations From Old English Poetry, rev. ed. (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1926), p. 80.

[39] Cook, p. 80.

[40] Carpenter, p. 64.

[41] Clyde S. Kilby, "Mythic and Christian Elements in Tolkien," in Myth, Allegory, and Gospel, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1974), p. 141.

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