

Catechetical Texts in *The Lord of the Rings*

TOLKIEN'S *The Lord of the Rings* has proved to be a "sign of contradiction" for nearly 50 years.

For instance, some of his fellow **academics** resented his success with "ordinary people" — just as **the** Pharisees despised them too; (cf. John 9:34).

Early on, a number of **reviewers** disparaged it. He replied, "Some, who have read the book, or at any rate reviewed it, have found it boring, absurd or contemptible; and I have no cause to complain, since I have similar opinions of their works, or of the kinds of writing that they evidently prefer..." [quoted from the foreword to Allen & Unwin's three volume edition of 1968].

One critic found it **full of Freud!** Yet another despised Tolkien for **omitting** sex — and said it was the work of a man who had never reached puberty. Tolkien asserted dryly that he had four children — and that epics were mainly about males.

Next, the allegorists claimed it was about the atomic bomb or World War II. He replied bluntly (tongue-in-cheek? see **allegory**, p. 4): "As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical... I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. **I much prefer history, true or feigned, with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'; but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author.**" *ibid.*

The evil most reprobated in *The Lord of the Rings* is that of riding rough-shod over the free will of others. Thus Sauron was most guilty and Gandalf most virtuous. Tolkien was determined to imitate Gandalf. **The evil Ring of Sauron was a work of cruel domination, hence the ultimate evil** in the story.

In sharp contrast, Elrond explains how different are the three rings of the Elves: "The Three were not made by Sauron, nor did he ever touch them. But of them it is not permitted to speak. So much only in this hour of doubt I may now say. They are not idle. But they were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power.

Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained..." Vol. I, Bk 2, Ch. 2.

ANew group of objectors has recently arisen, namely those who find in *The Lord of the Rings* an approval of the witchcraft like Harry Potter books.

These manifest an even stronger opposition than some Bible-only Christians of 30 years ago. The old opposition was akin to the rejection of Santa Clans. He was resented as a rival to our Saviour on His birthday, and Tolkien as a rival to Holy Scripture.

But the breadth and depth of Catholicism puts Santa Clans in his correct place as **Saint Nicholas, who is one among Our Lord's many saints.** Then, far from being in opposition, he is seen as Our Lord's disciple. It was only \$ which corrupted St Nicholas, not truth!

There are stark Contrasts 'twixt Christianity and Evil

GOD	truth	goodwill	miracle	Sacra-ments	grace	virtue
Satan	lies	ill-will	magic	occult	graceless	sin

THE HAPPY ENDING

Both the old and the new opponents seem to neglect Tolkien's essay on fantasy stories and their relationship with Christianity. This is the climactic theme of his small book, *Tree and Leaf*, most of which was a lecture he delivered in 1938, and which clarified for him where he was going with *The Lord of the Rings*.

Far from reducing the Christian Gospel to fantasy, and thereby wrecking it, Tolkien raises fantasy, at least fantasy with a happy ending, to having the status of a faint reflection of the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

EUCATASTROPHE, the 'turn' in the story

In this long quotation from Tolkien's *Tree and Leaf*, italics are his emphasis, and bold the editor's.)

"But the consolation of fairy-tales has another aspect than the imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires.

Far more important is the **Consolation of the Happy Ending.** Almost I would venture to assert that all complete fairy-stories must have it. At least I would say that Tragedy is the true form of Drama, its highest function; but the opposite is true of Fairy-story. Since we do not appear to possess a world that expresses this opposite — I will call it *Eucatastrophe*. The *eucatastrophic* talc is the true form of fairy-tale, and its highest function.

"The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending: or more correctly of **the good catastrophe**, the sudden joyous 'turn': 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 *dys-catastrophe*. of sorrow or failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of 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.

"It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and uplifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art, and having a peculiar quality.

A FAR-OFF GLEAM OF GOSPEL JOY

"Even modern fairy-stories can produce this effect sometimes. "It is not an easy thing to do; it depends

on the whole story which is the setting of the turn, and yet it reflects a glory backwards... In such stories, when the sudden 'turn' comes we get a piercing glimpse of joy, and heart's desire, that for a moment passes outside the [picture] frame, rends indeed the very web of story, and lets a gleam come through...

"Probably every writer making a secondary world, a fantasy, every sub-creator, wishes in some measure to be a real maker, or hopes that he is drawing on reality: hopes that the peculiar quality of the secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it. If he indeed achieves a quality which can fairly be described by the dictionary definition: 'inner consistency of reality', it is difficult to conceive how this can be, if the work does not in some way partake of reality. The peculiar quality of 'joy' in successful Fantasy can thus be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality or truth. It is not only a 'consolation' for the sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, 'Is it true?' The answer to this question that I gave at first was (quite rightly): 'If you have built your little world well, yes: it is true in that world'. That is enough for the artist (or the artist part of the artist). But in the 'eucatastrophe' we see in a brief vision that the answer may be greater — it may be a far-off gleam or echo of evangelium in the real world. The use of this word gives a hint of my epilogue. It is a serious and dangerous matter. It is presumptuous of me to touch upon such a theme; but if by grace what I say has in any respect any validity, it is, of course, only one facet of a truth incalculably rich: finite, only because the capacity of Man for whom this was done is finite.

THE CHRISTIAN STORY IS REAL HISTORY

"I would venture to say that approaching the Christian story from this direction, it has long been my feeling (a joyous feeling) that God redeemed the corrupt making-creatures, men, in a way fitting to this aspect, as to others, of their strange nature. The Gospels contain a fairy-story, or a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of fairy-stories. They contain many marvels — peculiarly artistic, beautiful, and moving: 'mythical' in their perfect, self-contained significance; and among the marvels is the greatest and most complete conceivable eucatastrophe. But this story has entered History and the primary world; the desire and aspiration of sub-creation has been raised to the fulfillment of Creation. The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the Incarnation. This story begins and ends in joy. It has pre-eminently the 'inner consistency of reality'. There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true, and none which so many

sceptical men have accepted as true on its own merits. For the Art of it has the supremely convincing tone of Primary Art. that is, of Creation. To reject it leads either to sadness or to wrath. "It is not difficult to imagine the peculiar excitement and joy that one would feel, if any specially beautiful fairy-story were found to be 'primarily' true, if its narrative to be history, without thereby necessarily losing the mythical or *allegorical* significance that it had possessed. It is not difficult, for one is not called upon to try and conceive anything of a quality unknown. The joy would have exactly the same quality, if not the same degree, as the joy which the 'turn' in the fairy-story gives: such joy has the very taste of primary truth. (Otherwise its name would not be joy.) It looks forward (or backward: The direction in this regard is unimportant) to the Great Eucatastrophe. **The Christian joy, the *Gloria*, is of the same kind; but it is pre-eminently (infinitely, if our capacity were not finite) high and joyous. But this story is supreme; and it is true.** Art has been verified. God is the Lord, of angels, and of men — and of elves. Legend and History have met and fused. "But in God's kingdom the presence of the greatest does not depress the small. Redeemed Man is still man. Story, fantasy, still go on, and should go on. The Evangelium has not abrogated legends; it has hallowed them, especially the 'happy ending'."

Answers to Objections

OBJECTION: Where is Ronald Tolkien's Catholic-faith in God to be found in *The Lord of the Rings*.'

ANSWER: Tolkien's friend, Father Robert Murray S.J. admitted that, "**There is no named God**, no religious rites, no faith except the good faith of true men to one another. True, it is full of 'sacraments' but they are never named as such. The whole drama is profoundly ethical, not as allegory but as an exploration of how goodness and wickedness work and strive in human hearts and society... In 1953, at Tolkien's request I had expressed to him my reactions to what I had read so far, and remarked how, without a word about religion, **the book is all about grace.**"

Tolkien replied, "I think I know exactly what you mean by the order of grace, and of course, your references to our Lady, upon which all my own small perception of beauty both in simplicity and majesty is founded. *The Lord of the Rings* is, of course, a **fundamentally a religious and Catholic work**: unconsciously at first, consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all reference to anything like religion, to cult or practices. in the imaginary world. **For the religious elements are absorbed into the story and symbolism.**"

The above paragraphs are quoted from The Catholic Weekly of 4th October, 1973, in a feature article announcing Tolkien's death on 3rd September, 1973. Nevertheless, The Lord of the Rings includes strong hints at Providence, thus:

Gandalf: "There was more than one power at work... Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and nor by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought." Vol. 1. Bk I. Ch. 2.

At last with an effort he [Frodo] spoke, and wondered to hear his own words, as if some other will was using his small voice. "I will take the Ring, though I do not know the way." Vol. 1, Bk II, Ch. 2. There is a cryptic reference to God in Appendix A: "The Valar laid down their Guardianship and called upon the One. and the world was changed." Not until The Silmarillion is the One named as Eru or Iluvatar, and quite clearly the Creator

OBJECTION: Tolkien features magic and the priest-exorcist of Rome said that all magic is Satanic.

ANSWER: Tolkien admitted that he used the word 'magic' loosely — just as we ourselves tend to do. But Galadriel insisted on distinguishing clearly between what Frodo and Sam called 'her magic' and the deceits of the Enemy: "For this is what your folk

would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem also to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy. But this, if you will, is the magic of Galadriel. Did you not say that you wished to see Elf-magic?" Vol. I, Bk II, Ch. 7.

The so-called good magic in fairy-stories is akin to miracles in the Bible. Even in the Bible the signs and wonders are rarely referred to as 'miracles'. Contrast Aaron's staff turned into a snake by "a miracle" devouring the staff-snakes of Pharaoh's wizards produced by 'their secret arts'; Exodus 7:9-13.

Again, miracles were perceived as magic by Simon Magi but that did not make them evil; Acts 8:9-24. And we must distinguish Simon Magi from those other Magi who "found the Child with Mary His Mother and falling clown adored Him," Matthew 2:1-12.

And the 'power-stick' qualities of Gandalf's staff remind one of Moses at the Red Sea, Exodus 14:16.

OBJECTION: The Bible forbids us to have any trade with 'a wizard' or 'sorcerer', Deuteronomy 18:10-11; and just think of the Witch of Endor, 1 Samuel 28:3-19.

ANSWER: Tolkien uses 'wizard' in the old-English sense of a wise old man. Thus his seven wizards are all good, except that Saruman turns bad, for "nothing was evil in the beginning". Vol. I, Bk II, Ch. 2.

Tolkien, however, consistently uses 'witch' and 'sorcerer' for ones who are already evil: thus the chief of the nine riders, "Number One", the Lord of the Ring Wraiths, is "the Witch-king of Angmar, long ago" (from Appendix B: note how even in modern usage Witch-doctor means a man, not a woman).

Christian Applicability

WITH APPLICABILITY rather than allegory, however, we can use The Lord of the Rings to enrich catechists: hence these texts, which will only be usable by (those who know and love the story, and thus 'speak' to the youthful devotees of the film.

VOCATION

GANDALF: "Sauron the Great, the Dark Lord... has indeed arisen again."

FRODO: "I wish it had not happened in my time."

GANDALF: "So do I, and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

FRODO: "I am not made for perilous quests, I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?"

GANDALF: "Such questions cannot be answered. You may be sure it was not for any merit that others do not possess: not for power or wisdom, at any rate. But you have been chosen, and you must therefore use such strength and wits as you have." Vol. 1, Bk 1, Ch. 2. THE MALICE OF SAURON

GANDALF [to Frodo]: "Hobbits as miserable slaves would please him Sauron far more than hobbits happy and free. There is such a thing as malice and revenge!" *ibid.*

TEMPTATION OF GANDALF

FRODO [Gandalf]: "You are wise and powerful. Will you not take the Ring?"

GANDALF [in reply]: "No! With that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly... Do not tempt me! I do not wish to become like the Dark Lord himself. Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire to do good... I dare not take it... The wish to use it would be too great for my strength." *ibid.*

GANDALF: "Only the use of the Ring could give us surety of victory... It has gone beyond our reach. Of that at least let us be glad. We can no longer be tempted to use the Ring. We must go to face a peril near despair, yet that deadly peril is now removed." Vol. 2, Bk III, Ch. 5.

THE EVIL OF 'USING EVIL MEANS TO GOOD ENDS'

SARUMAN [quoted by Gandalf to the Council of Elrond]: "This then is one choice before you, before us. We may join with that Power [Sauron]... We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring many evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose... There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means." Vol. 1, Bk II, Ch. 2.

ELROND [against Boromir]: "We cannot use the Ruling Ring. That we now know too well. It belongs to Sauron and was made by him alone, and is altogether evil. Its strength, Boromir, is too great for anyone to wield at will, save only those who have already a great power of their own. But for them it holds an even deadlier peril. The very desire of it corrupts the heart. Consider Saruman. If

any of the Wise should with this Ring overthrow the Lord of Mordor, using his own arts, he would then set himself on Sauron's throne, and yet another Dark Lord would appear. And that is another reason why the Ring should be destroyed: as long as it is in the world it will be a danger even to the Wise. For nothing is evil in the beginning. Even Sauron was not so. I fear to take the Ring to hide it. I will not take the Ring to wield it." — "Nor I," said Gandalf. *ibid.*

REJECTION OF INTRINSIC EVIL

GANDALF: "Magic rings as you would call them...". He goes on to explain that the Ring has an unwholesome power to induce lying, malice and revenge; and how Gollum used the ring for evil. Vol. 1, Bk I, Ch. 2.

FARAMIR: "I would not take this thing [The Ring], if it lay by the highway. Not were Minas Tirith falling in ruin and I alone could save her, so, using the weapon of the Dark Lord for her good and my glory. No, I do not wish for such triumphs." Vol. 2, Bk IV, Ch. 5.'

NO SITUATION ETHICS!

EOMER: "How shall a man judge what to do in such times?"

ARAGORN: "As he ever has judged. Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them..." Vol. 2, Bk III, Ch. 2.

OCCASIONS OF SIN

ELROND: "It is perilous to study too deeply the arts of the Enemy, for good or ill," Vol. 1, Bk II, Ch. 2. See Honesty

HOLY EUCHARIST

"They could eat of it [the 'lembas' "way bread of the Elves", bread for the journey, viaticum!] and find new strength even as they ran..." Vol. 2, Bk III, Ch. 2.

"The lembas *has* had a virtue without which they] Frodo and Sam would long ago have lain down to die. It did not satisfy desire, and at times Sam's mind was filled with memories of food, and the longing for simple bread and meats. And yet this waybread of the Elves had a potency that increased as travellers relied on it alone and did not mingle it with other foods. It fed the will, and gave strength to endure, and to master sinew and limb beyond the measure of mortal kind." Vol. 3, Bk VI, Ch. 3.

PRIEST, PROPHET AND KING

Then Frodo came forward and took the crown from Faramir and bore it to Gandalf; and Aragorn knelt, and Gandalf set the White Crown upon his head... Vol. 3, Bk VI, Ch. 5.

Cf. 1 Kings 1:34, "Let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him [Solomon] king over Israel."

GOOD DEATH

BOROMIR [as he lay dying from wounds defending Pippin and Merry from the orcs]: "I tried to take the Ring from Frodo... I am sorry. I have paid... Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed."

ARAGORN [in reply]: "You have conquered! Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace!" Vol. 2, Bk III, Ch. 1.

FARAMIR [on seeing Boromir's corpse]: "Whether he erred or no, of this I am sure: he died well, achieving some good. His face was more beautiful even than in life." Vol. 2, Bk IV, Ch. 5.

EVIL OF SUICIDE

DENETHOR: "We will burn like heathen kings..." Vol. 3, Bk V, Ch. 4.

GANDALF [to Denethor]: "Authority is not given to you, Steward of Gondor, to order the hour of your death. And only the heathen kings, under the domination of the Dark Power, did thus, slaying themselves in pride and despair, murdering their kin to ease their own death." Vol. 3, Bk V, Ch. 7.

TRAINING LEADERS:

apply to the lay apostolate

GANDALF [to the four hobbits]: "I am with you at present but soon I shall not be. I am not coming to the Shire.

You must settle its affairs yourselves; that is what you have been trained for... You are grown up now." Vol. 3, Bk VI, Ch. 7.

HUMILITY

SAM [to Frodo, about the elves]: "They seem a bit above my likes and dislikes... It don't seem to matter what I think about them. They are quite different from what I expected — so old and young, and so gay and sad." Vol. I, Bk I, Ch. 4.

Yet lie [Frodo] felt in his heart that Faramir, though he was much like his brother [Boromir] in looks, was a man less self-regarding, both sterner and wiser... Vol. 2, Bk IV, Ch. 5.

FARAMIR: "It displeased him [Boromir] that his father was not king... Does that not tell you something about him?" *ibid.*

HONESTY

FARAMIR: "I would not snare even an orc with a falsehood." *ibid.*

"Even if I were such a man as to desire this thing [Sauron's Ring], and even though I knew not clearly what this thing was when I spoke, still I should take those words as a vow, and be held by them. But I am not such a man. Or I am wise enough to know that there are some perils from which a man must flee." *ibid.*

MERCY

GANDALF: "Many that live deserve death. And some that die deserve life. Can you give it to them? Then do not be too eager to deal out death in judgement." Vol. I, Bk I, Ch. 2.

CONSECRATED LIFE:

apply to Chastity

FRODO: "I tried to save the Shire, and it has been saved, but not for me. It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them." Vol. 3, Bk VI, Ch. 9.

BOREDOM

EOWYN: "I would have you [Faramir] command this Warden, and bid him let me go," she said; but, though her words were still proud, her heart faltered, and for the first time she doubted herself. She guessed that this tall man,

both stern and gentle, might think her merely wayward, like **a child that has** not the firmness of mind to go on with **a dull task to the** end. Vol. 3, Bk VI, Ch. 5.

PROPORTIONAL FORCE VERSUS PACIFISM

THE WARDEN: "A great lord is that [Aragorn], and a healer; and it is a thing passing strange to me that the healing hand should also wield the sword... for long years we healers have only sought to patch the rents made by the men of swords. Though we should still have enough to do without them: the world is full enough of hurts and mischances without wars to multiply them."

EOWYN: "It needs but one foe to breed a war, not two, Master Warden. And those who have not swords can still die upon them. Would you have the folk of Gondor gather your herbs only, when the Dark Lord gathers armies? And it is not always good to be healed in body. Nor is it always evil to **die** in battle, even in bitter pain. Were I permitted, in this dark hour I would choose the latter." Vol. 3, Bk VI, Ch. 5.

FRODO: "Fight? Well I suppose it may come to that. But remember: there is to be no slaying of hobbits, not even if they have gone over to the other side. Really gone over, I mean; not just, obeying ruffians' orders because they are frightened. No hobbit has even killed another on purpose in the Shire, and it is not to begin now. **And nobody is to be killed at all, if it can be helped.** Keep your tempers and hold your hands to the last possible moment."

MERRY: "But if there are many of these ruffians, it will certainly mean fighting. **You won't rescue Latho or the Shire just by being shocked and sad, my dear Frodo.**" Vol. 3, Bk VI, Ch. 8.

SUNDAY, MARCH 25th

Neither supporters nor critics of The Lord of the Rings seem to advert to the significance of the calendar date and the day of the week on which **the Ring goes to the Cracks of Doom.**

It is on 25th March, as every Catholic and Anglican knows, that the Church celebrates the Annunciation, Lady Day, **the day of the Incarnation.**

Great emphasis is laid on this date: "But in Gondor the New Year will always now begin upon the twenty-fifth of March when Sauron fell." Vol. 3, Bk II, Ch. 4.

In Medieval England the civil year began on this day. And the *Catholic Encyclopedia* discloses that **the 25th March** was also the day ascribed to **Christ's Crucifixion** in the early centuries of Christianity, and because of its significance at the beginning of Spring (the vernal equinox) **it was also in legend the day of creation, of the Fall of Lucifer, of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, and of the Exodus through the Red Sea.**

Although the names of weekdays are not mentioned after the early parts of the book, a careful calculation through all the intervening days, (and every detail like a day is carefully accounted for in Tolkien's 'inner consistency of reality'), shows that the 25th March is a Sunday. This is confirmed in the Appendices, both in the Tale of the Years and in the

Shire Calendar, where **the 25th March is always a Sunday** in every year of their permanent calendar — see Appendix D.

Thus this dating of the 'eucatastrophe' has applicability to the Incarnation and Resurrection as expounded in *Tree and Leaf*.

Good and Evil in Story Books

A BOOK can be about evil and not be an evil book. Nor is its author necessarily an evil man, e.g. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. This is not to recommend these books for general reading, but to situate them accurately. Indeed, it is precisely because of the evils they describe and the way they do it that they have relevance to our own "wicked and adulterous generation."

Discernment

PARENTS, and boys and girls old enough to be responsible for their own reading, might make Solomon's prayer their own: "Give **thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people, that I may discern** between good and evil..."

"It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind...' (1 Kings 3:9-12). See Michael O'Brien's *Landscape with Dragons*: as well as providing readings lists (without any Australian writers!) he develops some principles for parents to discern between good and evil in children's books.

An Author's Duty

THE Art of Teaching by Gilbert Highet, 1951, deals with responsibility for "Teaching in Everyday Life", (Ch. V): "The wisest of the Greeks used to say that a politician was

bound to lie a teacher. He is not, they thought, merely dominating the people, but educating them. By each law he sponsors, he encourages them to behave in a certain way — to be saving or extravagant, to be brave or cowardly, dutiful or irresponsible. By the general trend of his policies he makes the people, shape their lives in one direction rather than another. It **is** his duty, therefore, to **choose such** policies as **will make the** people develop **good qualities rather than bad ones**. If a statesman, however powerful, leaves the nation more silly and lazy and vicious than he found it, then, Plato says, he has been a bad statesman.

"Like politicians, authors... are teachers, because they persuade their public... Books are about people. People act in a moral world. As we read the books, we hear the voices of the characters, and see their actions. Behind

both we hear the voice of the author himself, implying praise of this action, making fun of that, omitting a cruel consequence here, inserting a detailed description there. All this adds up to **a series of judgements about life which he wishes us to accept...** Yet many writers will not admit this. They will not say they are trying to persuade. The,)' will not say the,)' are teaching. They say, 'I am trying to put down the truth as I see it,' and if we ask: 'Why?' they shrink from the obvious answer which is 'To communicate my view of the truth to others' which means 'To teach them what I believe.' All books contain persuasion. All books communicate a selection of judgements about life. All books try to teach. The differences are between those which teach well and those which teach badly, and between those which teach valuable things and those which teach bad or trivial things. Criticism deals with these important differences... **For teaching is a serious responsibility...** It must be a frightful thing to write a series of plays or novels, rapidly and irresponsibly, in order to gain a reputation and make money; and then, late in life, to realize that they express foolish or wicked ideas, and to be ashamed of your own words. The surest safeguard against that is to ask how your ideas could possibly be misused or misunderstood, and to think, not of yourself, but of your friends and brothers whom you are trying to teach."

Not a Trilogy but One Book

Incidentally, *The Lord of the Rings* is NOT a trilogy. Raynor Unwin was the junior partner in the publishing firm and was in charge at the crucial time of its publication. He sent a telegram to his father in Japan: "I think we have a work of genius and I think we shall lose a thousand pounds."

With "the wisdom that comes from distance" (Raynor Unwin's words) his father replied, "If (underlined) you have a work of genius then (underlined) you may lose a thousand pounds." The young man went on to explain, "For the sake of practicalities, it was I who divided the book into three parts, but don't call it a trilogy. **It is not a trilogy, it is all one book**. Then there was a delay of over a year in publishing the third volume because Tolkien kept rewriting the Appendices. Those blessed appendices... people starting telephoning the publishers to complain — something that had never happened before — real people do not talk to publishers..."

A Personal Note on the Film

I have not seen the films of *The Lord of the Rings* and I propose not to do so. However, I am very glad they are proving such a success and that they have ennobled the lives of so many viewers with good and Godly ideas and ideals.

In so far as they do this, these films are of the Holy Spirit — "every truth, no matter who said it, is of the Holy Spirit," which St Thomas Aquinas loved to quote from St Augustine.

However, Tolkien insisted on the difference between literature and drama — spelled out in some detail in passages other than those, I quoted above from *Tree and Leaf*. Following him, I do not intend to limit my imagination to the presentations of the film makers. Also my regrets that the films depart from the book from time to time are a lesser matter — like marriage, such technics are always "for better or for worse". And I hope all the viewers will meditate the book as well!

Father James Tierney