The fantasy writing of Tolkien was Catholic!

Well, not so fast ...

For the last half century, unlike any other time in the 2,000 years of Christianity, mythology and "fantasy" have been embraced by otherwise faithful Catholics who not only claim that the Faith can be found in these works -- but that these works are the new way to spread the True Faith.

A traditional Catholic mission priest and friend of Rorate took on this controversial subject recently at a conference. Below, please find both the written transcripts, the audio and the slides that accompany the audio of the conference.

Note: this is not the position of Rorate Caeli, but arguments by a traditional priest presenting a view of the matter that is different from that usually presented as the only acceptable one. [UPDATE: Follow-up here.]

Audio and slideshow part 1 (click here)

Audio and slideshow part 2 (click here)

Read the text of the conferences by clicking "read more" below:

Conference NO. 1

St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy: “Know also this, that, in the last days, shall come dangerous times. […] I charge thee, before God and Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead, by His coming, and His kingdom: Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine. For there shall be a time, when they will not endure sound doctrine; but, according to their own desires, they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables. But be thou vigilant, labour in all things, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry. Be sober” (2Tim 3:1f).

I would like to begin this conference with a little apology. In the first place, I am sorry that what I am presenting today on fantasy literature, myths, and Gnosticism is so late in coming. It seems to me most of this information should have been made known much sooner… and at more authoritative levels.

Second, what I am presenting may not be easy for some to hear. Many, many good and well-intentioned Catholics love the works of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis… so much so, this subject has become a sort of sacred cow. Sad to say, as a result, many of these well-intentioned Catholics are more prepared to defend these modern literary works than they are the Sacred Scriptures or the dogmas of the Church. Such a reaction is always a sign that something is not quite right.

Third, I am speaking from personal experience in this area, as I myself was very much captivated by the fantasy works of both Lewis and Tolkien for many years. It was my custom for over a decade to read or listen to The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings at least once a year. I listened to all the versions too… the unabridged version, the BBC dramatized versions, as well as other American productions. Anything that was available. I also listened to Tolkien’s Silmarillion two times. Only after a priest friend worked on me for some time did I finally start to look closer at things and discern the spirits. At the time this conversion took place I was working for some cloistered nuns and sought to pray as much as they did. This quiet time and long periods of mental prayer allowed me to discern many things… as St. Ignatius of Loyola had done so long ago. Reflecting on the advice of the priest and noting the ill effects of my annual listening to The Lord of Rings, I finally received the strength and courage to destroy my audios of the Tolkien series. As a result, almost immediately, I was granted a special grace, confirming my decision. I was free. Since then I found other trustworthy and faithful souls (among them some priests) who have experienced similar things. In this way, I knew I was on the right path. But why?

That is what I hope to reveal now. But to do this well, let us begin with a little disclaimer. I am not here to condemn J.R.R. Tolkien nor those who are, from all I can gather, misled in promoting his works as being authentically Catholic… and here I am referring especially to the good hearted Mr. Joseph Pearce. To prepare this talk, I listened to his 8-part course on The Lord of the Rings as well as other talks and read various interviews he has given. I have also looked through various parts of his books and articles on this subject. I owe him much in understanding Tolkien better. But at the same time, I am also here to fulfill my duty as a priest of the Holy Roman Catholic Church… whose responsibility it is to be vigilant in protecting the faithful from what is potentially dangerous, what is of fables and not of sound doctrine.

As St. Paul says… these are dangerous times. That means good people can be misled very easily. There is a revolution going on and it has reached the highest levels in history. We are neck deep in toxic waters. How easy it is to take a drink and become intoxicated… to become captivated. Consider a few very serious examples. I very much appreciate the Catholic physicist and author Dr. Wolfgang Smith. He wrote an excellent treatise (printed by TAN Books) unmasking Teilhard de Chardin and his new religion of evolution. He has also written many profound articles on contemporary science as viewed in the light of Tradition, some of them gathered in one volume… entitled The Wisdom of Ancient Cosmology. Yet, in this book, he has a section where he discusses German Theosophy and a man named Jacob Boehme who received mystical revelations about the universe. Yet, both of these are of the occult. They are outside the safe boundaries of the Church! Clearly, he fell into a trap in considering these as safe sources. These are dangerous times.

Another example. Perhaps you have heard of the author Louis de Wohl. He wrote many historical novels on the lives of the saints and various historical personages… King David, St. Paul, Constantine, St. Benedict, St. Thomas, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine and many others. Yet, he was an avowed astrologist, writing a book defending astrology in the 1930s called, Secret Service of the Sky. He entitled his autobiography: I Follow My Stars. De Wohl worked for MI5 (secret service of England) during WWII using astrology. He also wrote a novel on a spiritual battle between a “Catholic astrologer” and sort of antichrist like witch… entitled Strange Daughter …he was the astrologer in the story. Good man… yet looking in unsafe places. St. Augustine, who once dabbled in astrology himself, glorified the wise and loving Providence of God as opposed to the fatalistic notions captured by astrology. Yet, with 19th Century revival of the occult, astrology is back… These are dangerous times. To counter these revolutionary ideas, the First Vatican Council had to repeat the teaching that God, through His Providence, protects and guides all that He has created (cf. Dz. 1784). The Church has always shunned astrology while promoting trust and abandonment to Divine Providence.

Another example: Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II) as young man used to act in Dr. Kotlarczyk’s Rhapsodic Theater. Kotlarczyk focused on the “mystery of the intoned word” working primarily with the mechanics of the voice, emotion, and expression. Later he wrote a book called Art of the Living Word (1975) in which he openly discussed the contributions of magic and the arcane—a word that means esoteric or secretly hidden. Think about it. What do occultists do but utter words that seemingly cause something to happen. Of special note here, among the many arcane works Kotlarczyk draws upon include those of the leading occultist and foundress of Theosophy, Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (d. 1891). By the way, Cardinal Wojtyla (whose canonization is proposed to take place soon) wrote a preface to this work of Kotlarczyk. Again, we see what appears to be men of good will…yet looking for things in the wrong places… these are dangerous times.

One last example. Once when visiting the chapel of a religious house in the Midwest, I was taken with the beauty of the Italian marble high altar and baldachino covered with mosaics. Yet, after being shown (beyond any shadow of a doubt) that the whole thing was actually a Rosicrucian Masonic work of art (proven to be so by various experts and exorcists)…it struck me square in the face how dangerous these times really are. At first sight it looked very Catholic…but on closer inspection, it was not Catholic at all. Dangerous times. Dangerous times.

And these are only a few examples of how easily we can be deceived with what looks like a good thing at first, but upon closer inspection is contrary and toxic to our faith… is offensive to God and His Church.

Let’s begin our exposition of fantasy literature by doing what St. Paul said… namely using doctrine (i.e., the rule of faith) to make the proper corrections. “Preach the WORD: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine. For there shall be a time, when they will not endure sound doctrine…” What WORD is this but God’s Word… God’s Divine Revelation. In this Word… in this Revelation is contained all we need to be sanctified and saved in this life. It is the well-spring of all happiness and peace for our souls. This Revelation, this WORD, is only found in the Deposit of the Faith of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. So, we must start there… we must always have recourse to the doctrines of our holy and infallible faith to survive these dangerous times.

Not surprisingly, St. Ignatius teaches something similar in the first of his “Rules for Thinking with the Church” …namely, “Putting aside all private judgment, we should keep our minds prepared and ready to obey promptly and in all things the true Spouse of Christ Our Lord, our Holy Mother, the hierarchical Church.” Thus, if we find any author contradicting doctrines of the Church, then we know we have a problem… The integral good of the work is lost and should only be approached with great care and caution if not altogether rejected as harmful to the faith. Even though we may enjoy the work… find it fascinating… captivating and exciting, we must put aside our private judgment and our emotions in order to conform ourselves to our Holy Mother the Church and live by faith.

Turning to our subject today, it is well established that JRR Tolkien, a philologist…someone who studied words and languages, enjoyed researching and discussing mythology, especially that of Northern Europe. As a result, he developed a sort of “philosophy of myth” while shunning allegory, saying, “I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations.” He criticized C.S. Lewis for his too transparent allegories and resisted all attempts to make his own works allegorical. Here we already have a problem because God loves allegory. He placed allegories in the Scriptures as St. Paul explains in Galatians. Thus, one of the main ways to interpret the Sacred Scriptures is the allegorical sense. A whole school of thought in the early Church, the Alexandrian School, has contributed many things to the exposition of the Scriptures using allegory. The Fathers of the Church, the Doctors and the Saints employed allegory to explain the faith. This is not something to demean or despise… regardless of how well or poorly various authors, whether modern or medieval, have used allegories.

But there is more to this. According to Joseph Pearce, Tolkien thought that myth was a better way to transmit various high level truths: “Tolkien … believed that mythology was a means of conveying certain transcendent truths which are almost inexpressible within the factual confines of a ‘realistic’ novel.” In another place: “For Tolkien, myth …was the only way that certain transcendent truths could be expressed in intelligible form” (Tolkien: Man and Myth, Pearce, p. XIII). I hope your alarm bells are going off. This is a sign of modern revolutionary thinking… which teaches that only in recent times have we finally figured out how to do things right … in this case, how to transmit high level truths. What? All these centuries we have failed to transmit the transcendent truths of God in a realistic manner? Does this make any sense? NO!

In order to see what I am saying here, let us stop for a moment to consider that millions upon millions of people have read The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit. It was so popular back in the 1960’s that the book sellers, especially those on college campuses, did not even bother to place them on the shelves. Instead they just stacked them by the checkout stand. Ballantine Books estimated that over 50 million people had read the books by 1968 (150 million by 2011). Soon hobbitry became a way of life…with hobbit parties. Tolkien societies sprang up. It has made its way into religious life… I have heard of “hobbits in habits” and seen many photo-shopped pictures of nuns as elves and hobbits.

In the 1960’s “Graffiti from coast to coast read, GANDALF FOR PRESIDENT and COME TO MIDDLE EARTH. An American Green Beret officer even translated the book into Vietnamese and distributed it to top South Vietnamese officers. Tolkien was inundated with offers by toy makers, movie producers and television executives, all hoping to cash in on the book’s success. [Even the Beatles approached Tolkien to make a movie of The Lord of the Rings with John Lennon (the most avid Tolkien reader among them) as Gollum, Paul McCartney as Frodo, Ringo Star as Sam, and George Harrison playing Gandalf.] There was even a North Borneo Frodo Society. … In London, rock clubs picked up the vibe, with places like Middle Earth and Gandalf's Garden catering to aspiring hobbits” (Turn Off Your Mind, p. 78). Various “psychedelic rock” bands sprang up, taking names from Tolkien’s works… Gandalf recorded one album for Capital Records in 1969; Gandalf the Grey, on Grey Wizard Records, appeared in 1972. In 1970 a band named Khazad Dum—after a city in the mines of Moria in Tolkien’s Middle Earth—released one album” too (idem, footnote, p. 78). Think about it. All this over The Lord of the Rings. Millions upon millions read these works. And yet, where are the conversions!? Instead of coming to Christ, they go to rock-n-roll. If this mythology of Tolkien is supposed to be more effective in transmitting high-level truths about God, where is the effect? The atheistic leaning Edith Stein read the Autobiography of St. Teresa of Jesus in one night. By morning, she was Catholic. A few years later she entered a convent and died a cruel death for our Holy Faith. She is only one among many such conversions from reading the works of saints like St. Teresa of Jesus. Among all the millions of avid Tolkien readers, is there anyone who came to the truths of our faith through his books? Not that I have heard. What does this mean? It seems clear to me that these books, these myths of Middle Earth, are not channels of grace! They do not effectively transmit high-level truths that convert souls.

To see how this is true, let us focus our attention on the definition and use of myth. In general, myths are fictitious narratives or fables, which seek to explain how the world and humanity came to be in their present form by including the roles of supernatural persons, actions, or events. They embody some popular ideas concerning nature or historical events. Thus, myths appear in many cultures to explain their beginnings, inevitably touching upon cosmic and human origins, as well as other important subjects like the origins of human institutions, man’s quest for happiness and his success and failures in finding it. For example, Freemasonry is very much based on a myth surrounding Solomon’s Temple. Historically, the particular focus of myth is to show how the gods relate with man and nature. Among the most famous myths we have are those of the Greeks, the Egyptians and the Romans.

When looking at the historical development and use of myths, it is very important to know that no one traces any of them to the Sacred Scriptures… because the Bible contains no myths! Only recently have the modernist scholars tried to force the category of myth upon the Bible (most especially Gen 1-11 and the plagues of Exodus). In other words, these “scripture scholars” tried to say the sacred writers of the Bible were not original but rather borrowed much from the ancient myths of their time. Yet, Pope Pius XII has addressed this issue in Humani Generis no. 39: … “whatever of the popular narrations have been inserted into the Sacred Scriptures must in no way be considered on a par with myths or other such things, which are more the product of an extravagant imagination than of that striving for truth and simplicity which in the Sacred Books, also of [including] the Old Testament, is so apparent that our ancient sacred writers must be admitted to be clearly superior to the ancient profane writers.” Note what Pius says: There are no myths in the entire Bible! What we find there is superior to such forms! …“myths … are more the product of an extravagant imagination than of that striving for truth and simplicity...” The Prophet Baruch basically says the same to those in the Babylonian Exile: “The children of Agar … that search after the wisdom that is of the earth, …and the tellers of fables, and searchers of prudence and understanding: but the way of wisdom they have not known, neither have they remembered her paths” (3:23). In other words, there is very little striving for the truth in fables and myths outside the Church!

Second, we should note well that every time the Apostles Peter and Paul employ the Greek word muthos, it is pejorative. Here is a sampling… St. Peter: “For we have not by following artificial fables (muthos), made known to you the power, and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; but we were eyewitnesses of His greatness. For He received from God the Father, honour and glory: this voice coming down to Him from the excellent glory: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (2Peter 1:16-17). Christ is the Word Incarnate… and there are no myths in this Word! St. Paul mentions myths four times, all pejorative… To St. Timothy as we heard at the start of this conference, namely how many “will indeed turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned unto fables (muthos)” (2Tim 4:4). Here is another example from his letter to St. Titus: “Not giving heed to Jewish fables (muthos) and commandments of men, who turn themselves away from the truth” (1:14). The Church and the Scriptures seem to be saying the same thing… myths, that is, artificial fables… the work of an extravagant imagination… are not a safe path to truth!

Now some may object here by saying there are various mythological references in the Bible. What of the unicorn mentioned by King David? Fauns by Jeremiah? and what about Leviathan? When we look into these matters with the help of the Fathers of the Church as well as the doctors, we find the unicorn is a rhinoceros and Leviathan a whale or a dinosaur… fauns and the like… demonic manifestations. These are not mythical!

In any case, it easy to see why there are no myths in the Scriptures. Because, we have the real thing! God Our Father is the Creator. We know what He has done with certainty… because He told us! And it is wonderful to behold. We know how He works with men and His creation. We have no need for myths! We have the Word Incarnate!

To carry this to yet another step. Consider for a moment that none of the Fathers of the Church, nor any of our saints has ever taken up the myths of old as something good, something to be commented upon or something to imitate as a way to transmit some truth. According to the renowned expert on the Church Fathers, Johannes Quasten, the early Greek apologists like St. Justin Martyr (who had an “excellent knowledge of Greek mythology”) “exposed the absurdities and immoralities of the paganism and the myths of its divinities, at the same time demonstrating that the Christian alone has the correct understanding of God and the universe” (Patrology, Christian Classics, vol 1, p. 187). Quasten also explains how Pope St. Clement I in his work Exhortation to the Greeks contains a “polemic against the ancient mythology” while defending “the greater antiquity of the Old Testament” (idem, vol 2, p. 8). Pope Pius XII is vindicated! Later when some Neo-Platonists tried to recover various Greek myths by giving them allegorical interpretations, St. Eusebius of Caesarea exposed their folly and refuted them in his work Preparation for the Gospel (cf. idem, vol 3, p. 329). And so on with the other fathers.

When reflecting on the works of the Saints, I cannot think of one who wrote a myth or a fable to transmit truth. There is Dante’s Divine Comedy…but it is more an epic poem that is allegorical in nature rather than mythical. Then there is St. Thomas More’s Utopia which is a novel that was by no means disconnected from this world nor was it attempting to show origins of any kind. In fact, it spawned all sorts of discussions of important matters touching on human life and the state. It was not mythical! St. Teresa of Jesus wrote a novel as a teenager but later totally disapproved of all novels and prevented her sisters from reading such low level works in her Carmels. St. John Bosco had very vivid dreams… again not myths but real visions that touched upon the life of the Church, some of which are still to be fulfilled. In a word, I cannot find any examples of saints using myths or fables to transmit truth.

Yet there are the works of the 14th Century Dominican, Meister Eckhart. Apparently, he tried to revive the use of myth and Christianize them. His works were put on trial and condemned for the presence of many errors. It should come as no surprise to find various heretical philosophers of the 19th Century, as well as Madame Helena Blavatksy’s Theosophical Society, reviving and adopting his ideas. Many other New Age thinkers like the apostate Fr. Matthew Fox have promoted Meister Ekhart. Obviously, we are forced to conclude that the saints did not consider the myth able to convey truth whereas the heretics did. The Church and History have shown the saints to be right.

It should be noted here that Joseph Pearce says over and over again how misunderstood Tolkien is…even “mythunderstood.” The main reason he gives for this breakdown? Tolkien had a different, more elevated understanding of myth. Yet, here again, we are on the ground of modern erroneous ways of thinking which always tries to redefine words and meanings while keeping the word itself. The facts we have already gathered speak for themselves… myths are not safe avenues for transmitting truth. It seems clear to me that Tolkien has proved this like no one has ever done before. Think about it… 150 Million people have read his books… As a result, a whole industry has grown up around it… movies, a whole spread of fantasy writers and new myths have come about, games, and so on. This is big business! In the bedrooms of our youth we find full size posters of actors from The Lord of the Rings (who are known to live perverted lives and hold positions contrary to Christ and His Church). And through all this activity… the Church has not increased in size… but rather more and more of Her members have fallen away and even apostatized. These fruits speak for themselves! The notion of myth, even in its so-called elevated view as held by Tolkien and promoted by Joseph Pearce, has not helped the Church in this difficult time.

In order to solidify this conclusion and confirm our faith, we must now turn our attention to the actual fantasy works of Tolkien. I will also briefly touch on other fantasy writers, like C.S. Lewis, when fitting. Again we have to pause for a moment. Some try to say that Tolkien’s works are not fantasy but rather mythical. Yet, fantasy, as a category of literature, is defined as imaginative fiction involving magic and adventure, especially in a setting other than the real world. That covers nearly everything that both Tolkien and Lewis have presented…imaginative, fictional, magical and other-worldly. What more need be said? Myth and fantasy cover the same ground. In fact, Tolkien’s myth is more aligned with fantasy that the ancient myths because his is a world that is even more imaginative and divorced from our own than those of the ancient world.

It is well known… to construct his myth of Middle Earth, Tolkien first composed a language and then built up the story around it… creating people who could speak the language. Joseph Pearce goes so far to say that Middle Earth was Tolkien’s “word made flesh.” Not surprisingly, as a myth, Tolkien’s Middle Earth has a creation story behind it, found most fully explained in The Silmarillion. As expected of all myths, this creation story explained among other things how the world came to be and how evil entered the world. Lewis had to do the same thing with his Narnia Tales, although not nearly with the same skill as Tolkien.

In Tolkien’s creation, he has one god creating spiritual beings or demiurgs, sort of like our angels. His god then shows these demi-gods the theme of creation and asks them to sing in harmony with that theme. By their singing they participate in the creation of the world that will become Middle Earth for elves and men. Stop. We have arrived at one of the essential problems of myth. As products of “an extravagant imagination” they always become disconnected from the world God actually created. Since they are made up worlds, can we just put aside the teaching of the Church on creation? In other words, can heresy be allowed in a mythical world? After all, it is just a fantasy! No, we must insist that fantasy or myth is no excuse for heresy! Especially if that myth is promoted as being “profoundly Christian.”

What Tolkien has given us here in his creation story is not Catholic but rather Gnostic. The Fathers of the Church rejected the Gnostic teaching on creation, which holds that the world was made through intermediary beings. St. Thomas says: “It is impossible for any creature to create, either by its own power, or instrumentally—that is, ministerially” (I,45,5). Thus, we hear the prophet Isaias say: “I am the Lord that made all things, that alone stretch out the heavens and establish the earth, and there is none with Me” (44:24). The First Vatican Council repeated the dogma of creation given at the Fourth Lateran Council: “God … immediately from the beginning of time fashioned each creature out of nothing, spiritual and corporeal, namely angelic and mundane; and then the human creation, …composed of both spirit and body” (Dz. 1783). Already, with this error alone, we can see that the integral good of Tolkien’s works has been lost. They are dangerous to our faith.

Listen to what some of Tolkien’s Catholic followers say of his ideas… as quoted by Pearce. Jesuit Fr. James V. Schall; echoing the views of another Jesuit, Fr. Robert Murray, a friend of Tolkien, exclaimed: “I have never read anything quite so beautiful as the first page of The Silmarillion ... the prose was appropriately scriptural.” No, sorry, it is pure Gnostic!

Another close friend of Tolkien admitted, “I am rather fond of The Silmarillion,... the idea that God allows the archangels to take part in the Creation .... It strikes me that his picture of the archangels is surprisingly like small children with their father,... All of this is the background to The Lord of the Rings as having been created by the archangels, the Valar, under the direction of the One.” Instead of passing on the truth through his myth, he is promoting heresy, namely that of Gnosticism, and it is being well received!

Unfortunately, there are many, many more such points in his works. How right was St. Thomas when he said, “A false idea about the nature of creation always reflects itself in a false idea about God.” Let’s consider a few more of these false ideas. Tolkien has the world unfolding over eons… thereby supporting the evolutionary ideas of our own time. I will let Joseph Pearce explain: “Tolkien … chose a place for the habitation of his Children ‘in the Deeps of Time and in the midst of the innumerable stars.’ Thus, in a feat of ingenious invention, or sub-creation, Tolkien not only distinguishes the Men and Elves as being made directly ‘in the image of God,’ essentially different from the rest of Creation, but at the same time accommodates the theory of evolution. The evolution of the cosmos was simply the unfolding of the Music of the Ainur within which the One places his Children in a habitation prepared for them. … In a similar feat of ingenuity, Tolkien explains that the Valar, the angelic powers given the responsibility of shaping the cosmos, have often been called “gods” by Men. In this way he manages to accommodate paganism as well as evolution within his mythology, making both subsist within Christian orthodoxy” (Tolkien: Man and Myth, pp. 90-91). Ah… wait a minute! Paganism… evolutionism… subsist within Christian orthodoxy? Can we not see how Pearce has fallen into the erroneous idea that pagan polytheism is a preparation for Christianity… a sort of evolutionary process of development… rather than seeing it for what the Scriptures tell us it is… “all the gods of the Gentiles are devils...” (Ps. 95:5). These pagan mythologies are devolutions (even devil-lutions) not developments! As you know, we and others have spoken many times on the pseudo-science of evolution and its complete lack of orthodoxy. Again, from this we see how the integrity of Tolkien’s works are deeply compromised… making them dangerous to read.

Consider yet another point, namely that in the Middle Earth of Tolkien, death for man is a gift: “the sons of Men die indeed, and leave the world; wherefore they are called the Guests, or the Strangers. Death is their fate, the gift of Iluvatar (Tolkien’s one god), which as Time wears even the Powers shall envy. But Melkor cast his shadow upon it, and confounded it with darkness and brought evil out of good, and fear out of hope” (The Silmarillion, p. 39). The Church teaches that death is a punishment of sin. Listen to the Book of Wisdom: “God made not death” (Wisdom 1:3) and “But by the envy of the devil death came into the world” (Wisdom 2:24). St. Paul declares: “By one man sin entered into the world and by sin death” (Rom. 5:12). The Church teaches us that God gave Adam and Eve the gift of immortality… which is completely opposite of what Tolkien is claiming. Again, we see that myth fails miserably to transmit very important truths.

Not surprisingly, if someone holds that death is a gift rather than a punishment, they will most likely hold that there is no hell or eternal penalty for sin. Sure enough, for Tolkien’s myth, there is no such place…only the Void or Shadow. When Gandalf confronted the Balrog in the mines of Moria, he does not command as an exorcist would…namely that infernal creature go back to hell! Instead, Gandalf says, “Go back to the Shadow!” When the Eowyn kills one of the Nine Black Riders, his death is portrayed as a fading voice that “was swallowed up and was never heard again in that age of the world.” Will it be heard in another age? Will he be able to come back? No mention of an eternal punishment here. Again, Tolkien’s myth is not transmitting truth but rather it seems more apt to transmit error.

Another essential point. As everyone knows there is much magic mentioned in the works of both Tolkien and Lewis. Some examples from Tolkien’s works: wizards, spells, magical items like rings, staffs and crystal balls. All of these play a major part in making The Lord of the Rings a successful story. And all of these have always been considered of the occult by the Church! For his part, Joseph Pearce tries to overcome this difficulty by making a distinction between “good” and “bad” magic. He says: “It would be more accurate to describe the so-called magic in The Lord of the Rings as miraculous, when it serves the good, and demonic, when it serves the bad.” So, according to Pearce, all the “magic” performed by Gandalf and others was really “miraculous” and not magic at all. The Church, however, has always held the miraculous as a sensible effect that surpasses nature and is produced by God to witness to some truth or the sanctity of some individual as well as providing a motive for true belief. Thus, the miracle of the Sun at Fatima witnessed to the truth of the apparitions to 70,000 viewers, many atheists among them. Yet, in The Lord of the Rings, there is no mention of God at all nor is there mention of faith or belief in God. Neither is there any pointing out the sanctity of individuals because there is no mention of holiness in the entire series! Yet, Gandalf puts closing spells on doors, makes things burn to keep the fellowship warm on the cold mountain and light their way in the dark mines of Moria, breaks the bridge under the Balrog, sees far with the crystal ball, reads the minds of others and so on. How are these things in any way miraculous as the Church has always understood this word? They are not. What is more, since there is no mention of the supernatural in the whole book, how can anything occurring in it be considered miraculous?

The Tolkien myth does, however, indicate the magical actions Pearce wants to call “miraculous” flowed from the power of the ring on Gandalf’s hand and the staff he carried. It is left nebulous how the ring tapped into the secret fire. Is the secret fire the Holy Ghost? That is not indicated. Again, miracles point to God’s presence… to God’s truth… to God’s holy ones. There is no vertical… no prayer… no mention of grace, the interior life, faith, hope and charity in these books. Clearly, this distinction of good magic as being the miraculous must be abandoned. All is horizontal… that is, all is a struggle between those who have access to secret powers that are within the nature of the mythical world of Tolkien itself. No supernatural is indicated! One clear indicator of this is how the rings begin to fail after the destruction of the one ring and consequently not much good or bad magic is worked after that.

Maybe in Tolkien’s myth there is “good” and “bad” magic, but that is far from the case in the real world. ALL magic is a form of sorcery and relies on demonic powers, whether the person using the magic accepts this or not. Thus, God has always been very strict on punishing and curtailing all wizards, witches and all forms of sorcery… even commanding their death according to the Law of Moses. Sad to say, this is not a message one will find in the Lord of the Rings. It seems to me that Pearce is reading into the story what he wants it to say.

As for C.S. Lewis, his fantasy works (the space trilogy and the Tales of Narnia) are also filled with problems. Not only does he have lots of this “good” magic, but also has multiple or parallel worlds and life on other planets. In The Magicians Nephew, the children go to a sort of staging ground or intermediate place where there are many, many portals to different worlds… some of which have passed away and some which are just beginning. Thus, in this way, the children were able to be present at the creation of Narnia. This is very problematic since it just programs our children for the ways of modern science which is all but completely fantasy-based now… with all their silly claims of a multiverse… or multi-universe, UFOs and life on other planets. Although Lewis tries hard to incorporate Christian allegory throughout his works, something Tolkien despised, he nevertheless had to use myth to build up his system…and, not surprisingly, instead of promoting truth, Lewis’ mythical elements promote error and heresy.

Although many more points could be considered such as how much these myths have become Big Business, or how this myth is constantly re-introduced… constantly promoted to keep it going… new books, new movies, new games…, nevertheless, I hope you will agree we have enough to discern clearly that there is no such thing as Christian Myth. Willy nilly they will produce a world that is in opposition to God’s creation… a “word made flesh” in opposition to Christ, the Word of God made flesh. This is because we have the real thing! We do not need myths. Meister Ekhart tried to baptize myth back in the 14th Century and his works were condemned. Myths are dangerous because they disconnect us from reality and try to introduce us into a fantasy land that does not exist. Even when such fantasy worlds may have startling representations of various truths, they inevitably introduce error and heresy. Yes, both Tolkien and Lewis have many things that touch on truth… for example, Pearce makes much out of the date of Our Lord’s Incarnation, March 25th, as being day the ring is destroyed. Lewis, with Aslan being the Christ, has many more points of contact than Tolkien. But such points of contact with authentic Christianity as these are not enough to purify the whole. As I said in the beginning of this conference, at first sight the chapel of the nuns was stunning. It looked so very Catholic, but upon closer inspection, even though there were many similarities in places, it was Freemasonic (something that is based on myth). It seems clear to me that all fantasy literature is a dead end and should be avoided.

In the next conference, I hope to show you why books like The Lord of the Rings have been so successful at this moment of history. To end for now, let us repeat the profound words of St. Peter our first Pope: “For we have not by following artificial fables (muthos), made known to you the power, and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; but we were eyewitnesses of His greatness. For He received from God the Father, honour and glory: this voice coming down to Him from the excellent glory: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (2Peter 1:16-17). We will please God and get to know Him, not through myths of any kind, but rather studying His Divine Revelation.

Conference NO. 2

“For we have not by following artificial fables (muthos), made known to you the power, and presence of our Lord Jesus Christ; but we were eyewitnesses of His greatness. For He received from God the Father, honour and glory: this voice coming down to Him from the excellent glory: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (2Peter 1:16-17).

St. Paul: “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding the profane novelties of words, and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called” (1Tim 6:20).

Let us begin by repeating the previous disclaimer, namely that I am not here to pass judgment on the person of J.R.R. Tolkien. From all accounts he was a devout Catholic. But all of us can pass judgment on his works and their effects and fruits. It seems clear to me… this has been done in our previous conference to a satisfactory degree using sound doctrine… even though many more points could be discussed. What remains is to ask WHY did he write these stories? Why did he try to baptize myth, something that had not been done successfully for nearly two millennia? How did Tolkien, a devout Catholic, end up writing this way? Was it just to write stories for his children?

Joseph Pearce claims that the Tolkien myth is “profoundly Christian,”… “a theological thriller.” In one of his letters, Tolkien wrote: “The Lord of the Rings is … a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision.” Why did he have to consciously revise it to be Catholic…? This is a most strange way of approaching the truths of God. It is a statement that he did not set out to make his work Catholic at the start.

Before we attempt to answer why he wrote this way, I would like to address a problem that is very much present in the membership of the Church today… namely that of looking only at what is good in things while ignoring the evil or the error. Traditionally, the Church not only points out what is true and good but also what is false, erroneous … what is evil… what is to be avoided. In dealing with the outbreak of the revolution that is still with us today… the revolution that really began with the Renaissance, the Council of Trent repeated itself a number of times in this regard, saying it was convened for “the extirpation of heresies and the reform of morals… [to draw] unbelievers to the faith, overcome heretics and confirm… the faithful” (3rd Session).

On the other hand, the New Agers of our time, children of the revolution, tend to look only for the positive in all religions in order to pick and choose what they like, not bothering with the rest. Thus, they will praise Our Lord and King for some of His sayings while passing over those that mention hell, sin and require conversion of heart… that require chastity. Madame Helena Blavatsky strove to do just this… even to form an occult group called the Theosophical Society to study and compare religions, philosophy, and science. (By the way, she was one of those who brought back the works of Meister Ekhart!) Thus, it is a kind of New Age mentality to examine the works of men like Tolkien and Lewis… highlighting what is perceived as true and good while passing over what is erroneous.

Consider for a moment Plato’s allegory of the cave found in The Republic. In this allegory, there are some people in a cave… chained from childhood in a fixed position such that they could not leave or move around much. All they could see was a sort of screen upon which shadows were cast of things passing by, due to the light of a fire that was hidden from the viewers. The people casting the shadows were carrying all kinds of things to and fro, such that they projected many different sorts of images. These same people also talked and carried on conversations as they passed… while the viewers heard only echoes bouncing off the walls, seemingly coming from the shadows themselves. Using their reason, the chained observers discussed these things trying to figure out what it all meant. They named the figures and developed elaborate ideas and theories concerning them. At some point, however, one of these observers was released and shown what was really happening. He was then taken from the cave into the outside world… into the open air and sunlight. He saw many things clearly and realized how wrong his previous ideas had been. Going back into the cave, he tried and tried to convince his fellow prisoners of what was really true… that they were seeing mere shadows. They all rejected the truth of which he was trying to convince them, ridiculed him, and even wanted to put him to death.

This allegory easily applies to our times. As Catholics we have the fullness of the faith… meaning that we have the benefit of being outside the cave in the open sunlight of God’s Revelation. Furthermore, we are not chained to worldly ways of thinking as others are… we have the ability to look at the reality of the world, using our faith under the guidance of the Church’s teaching along with Her fathers and doctors. Do we appreciate what a great gift this is?

On the other hand, those of the world, unwilling to embrace God’s Revelation, become very attached or chained to their own limited theories and ideas… Being locked into this world, suffering from the effects of original sin (which includes things like obstinacy and darkening of the intellect), they cannot help themselves in presenting everything they think and theorize about as being true… when in reality they only have little bits of information to go on from a very skewed perspective. Let us not be numbered among them!

Furthermore, as I have said, a sort of disease is present among us today. Having no more active Index of Forbidden Books… having put aside the penalties of the Church… ignoring the rather sobering prophecies of Fatima and other saints and approved seers of old… and with our last major Council being a Pastoral Council, the leaders of the Church have become afraid to point out the errors in things… for fear of sounding too negative, of sounding like the Church of the Council of Trent rather than the Church of Vatican II. Thus, the tendency now is to focus only on what is true and good and positive. This is not traditional! This is not authentic Catholicism! This is not safe! In fact, one could argue that it is New Age thinking making headway into the Church. What I am doing here may seem mean spirited… ruining the fun of a lot of Catholics… and so on…but this is not true. What we are doing here is what good Catholics have always done!

In regard to fantasy literature and myths, we must come out of the cave… we need to let go of our emotional attachments to such works, and judge them in God’s Light …the Light of the Deposit of the Faith… the light of doctrine. Although we may like sitting down in the cave… although we may find many things being proposed there by seemingly enlightened teachers as interesting and fascinating and captivating, when we see the reality, we must reject those ideas and free ourselves from them, lest they taint our thinking or worse still, damage our faith. These stories are exciting… yes! and that makes them pleasurable. But at the same time, pleasure blunts our judgment… making it more difficult to accept them as dangerous. Thus, not surprisingly, in the Allegory of the Cave, the chained observers rejected both the message and the messenger because he touched on the one thing they found pleasurable. May we not imitate their mistake!

All this applies directly to how Joseph Pearce presents The Lord of the Rings as being a “profoundly Christian myth” and a “theological thriller” while passing over the difficult points I have presented. For example, nothing is said of the strange and condemned Gnostic doctrine that has been woven into Tolkien’s creation story. Furthermore, Pearce presents a concept called “applicability” whereby myth becomes relevant while still remaining a myth and not an allegory. Thus, the staff of Gandalf can be the rod of Moses at times (which by way of typology is the Cross of Christ, according to the Fathers…and this is why Moses almost always used it with arms outstretched). But when we see the staff of Gandalf shattered before the Balrog… it is no longer applicable because the Cross remains firm… never to be moved. The staff of Moses was never broken but was placed inside the ARK. This “applicability” is nothing but a recipe for relativism… subjectivism with each person determining what is or is not “applicable” to him. Objectivity is lost! This is just how New Agers behave… taking what they find applicable to their life today and not worrying about the rest. And surely this is precisely one of the main reasons Tolkien’s works are so popular at this time… they fit in with the relativistic thinking. Everyone can read this work and make of the symbolism what they want, while rejecting the rest without any remorse. After all, it is only a fantasy… a myth… and we are free to make of it what we like.

It is an established fact that George Lucas, the producer of Star Wars, is a New Ager… that is, someone who has followed occult spirituality and is looking for the New Age to come. In his movie Willow, for example, the main actor has to learn that the power to perform magic resides in himself… in his own hands and fingers, as it were. Although Lucas was born and raised in a Methodist family, the religious and mythical themes in Star Wars were inspired by his interest in the writings of mythologist Joseph Campbell. As a result, Lucas would eventually come to identify strongly with the Eastern religious philosophies he studied and incorporated into his films, which philosophies were a major inspiration for “the Force.” Eventually, Lucas identified his religion as “Buddhist Methodist.” Yet, how many well-intentioned Catholics will watch Star Wars Trilogy and see all sorts of good things… even defending the series as being good and promoting virtue.

As noted, Lucas relied on Joseph Campbell for his understanding of myth. Campbell was another New Ager… someone operating under occult concepts. Let us pause here to see if his teaching does not coincide almost exactly with what many like Joseph Pearce are teaching about Tolkien. For Campbell, mythology has a fourfold function within human society. (i) The Metaphysical Function, which awakens a sense of awe before the mystery of being. According to Campbell, the absolute mystery of life, what he called transcendent reality, cannot be captured directly in words or images. Symbols and mythic metaphors on the other hand point outside themselves and into that reality. “Mythological symbols touch and exhilarate centers of life beyond the reach of reason and coercion.... The first function of mythology is to reconcile waking consciousness to the mysterium tremendum et fascinans of this universe as it is.” Sound familiar? What did Pearce say about why Tolkien chose the avenue of myth as a preferred literary form? “For Tolkien, myth …was the only way that certain transcendent truths could be expressed in intelligible form” (Tolkien: Man and Myth, Pearce, p. XIII). (ii) The Cosmological Function, which explains the shape of the universe. Sound familiar? Tolkien did this in his Silmarillion. (iii) The Sociological Function, which validates and supports the existing social order. Although Pearce points out that the Tolkien myth was about an idealized England under the rule of a king, the reader nevertheless may read into Tolkien’s works the evils of Nazism and Communism, as well as matters touching on the ecology and over industrialization of our times. (iv) The Pedagogical Function guides the individual through the stages of life, serving as a guide.

Campbell also believed that if myths are to fulfill their vital functions in our modern world, they must continually transform and evolve because the older mythologies, untransformed, simply do not address the realities of contemporary life, particularly with regard to the changing cosmological and sociological realities of each new era. In this, we see once again how dangerous is the use of myth. It is mush! It serves to support the current ways of thinking… evolution, big bang… progress, etc. No wonder these stories just keep re-surfacing in new ways!

Yet, there is much more. If we take a close look at the history of the revolution we are currently feeling so keenly, we know it began with some strength in the 1300s, when the leaders of Christendom started to reject Scholasticism and turn back to the pagan writings of the Greeks and the Romans. Unfortunately this movement has been mislabeled as the Renaissance… a rebirth. G.K. Chesterton rightly says it was a death not a birth. With the Renaissance all the wisdom of the high middle ages was pushed back and even rejected… and soon, the world, the flesh, and the devil started to make a return through the pagan writings of old that had been worked over and rejected by the Fathers and the Doctors. As a result of the Renaissance, man became more and more the focus of attention with God being more and more forgotten.

Not surprisingly, the occult began to manifest itself too. By the middle of the 15th Century, Pope Innocent VIII wrote a papal bull to address the problem of witches. At the same time, supported by this Pope, the Dominicans put together one of the most thorough teachings regarding the occult called Malleus Maleficarum … The Hammer of Witches.

What is more, many possessions were dealt with in the 16th and 17th Centuries, including some of the most famous in history such as Sr. Magdalena of the Cross (d. 1560) who after making a pact with the devil in childhood received visions, levitated, had the stigmata, and many other extraordinary phenomena. She fooled everyone! In the early 17th century there were times when even entire convents were infested with many diabolically possessed nuns.

By the middle of the 19th Century, the occult entered a time of revival and almost complete acceptance, most notably after Napoleon went to Egypt. A little later on the French seminarian Alphonse Louis apostatized in the 1840’s to became an occultist, converting his name to Eliphas Levi. He researched the occult in great depth and detail, gathering all he could find into several volumes that went through multiple printings. These volumes were greatly studied and used by Madame Helena Blavatsky, Aleister Crowley and those like them. As a result, the occult became popular and entered into our modern culture.

At the time Eliphas Levi was writing, there were many other manifestations of the occult taking place in America. For example, Andrew Jackson Davis, also known as the “Poughkeepsie Seer,” often fell into fits of ecstasy and spoke of planets and life on other worlds… and how the universe began with an explosion (i.e., a Big Bang!). Edgar Allen Poe was there to record many of Davis’ false vision and use them in his own strange works. Davis wrote several volumes, among them Principles of Nature wherein he set forth a creation myth: “IN THE BEGINNING, the Univercoelum was one boundless undefinable, and unimaginable ocean of LIQUID FIRE!” He went on to describe the making of the great universe and all its spiritual dimensions—of which life on earth was just one (cf. Occult America, Mitch Horowitz, p. 38). (By the way, Tolkien has a secret fire being placed at the heart of his universe… and it shows up all over… Gandalf’s ring, the fiery letters on the one ring, the ring can only be destroyed in the fire of Mt. Doom, etc.)

It was not long before books like Frank Baum’s The Wizard of Oz hit the presses and became a great success. This, by the way, is one of the places where the public is programmed that there is good magic and bad magic, good witches and bad witches. Soon there was an explosion of this sort of writing and thinking that seemed to reach a peak in the 1960s at the onset of the drug culture.

I have presented this long history in an attempt to show that Tolkien’s writings, sad to say, fit in well with this whole stream of thought…this occult-leaning spirituality… And this explains why he was its most popular author by the 1960s! Tolkien himself publicly stated to “the Daily Telegraph Magazine that what he really wanted to do was create a new version of the Atlantis myth” (Turn Off Your Mind, Lachman, p. 78). In referring to the incredible popularity of Tolkien’s works in the 1960s, the manager of the college bookstore at Berkeley California seems to have “put his finger on it when he said that this was ‘more than a campus fad; it’s like a drug dream.’ Some of the remarks readers made sounded like those coming from many LSD voyages. ‘Once you’ve read it, you have something in common with others who have read it’” (idem).

Like Louis De Wohl, Dr. Wolfgang Smith, and Dr. Kotlarczyk, what we see here is a good man looking in the wrong places and getting taken in by the swift current of the revolution. Can we not see why these are such dangerous times? The occult has never had such power as it does today! It is so insidious that most today fail to recognize it… even very intelligent Catholics! How right was a Carmelite Blessed in saying, “the devil is like the wind, he can get in through the tiniest cracks.”

To see all this in yet another way, consider the basic theme of the Renaissance is that the humanistic, naturalistic pagan works of ancient times led man out of the trouble in which he had found himself in the 13th Century. This backwards sort of thinking… is mirrored in the works of Tolkien. Some examples: How did Bilbo escape from goblin caves under the Misty Mountains? He was led out by the miscreant Gollum. How did Gandalf make it out of the deep pit into which he and the Balrog fell in the mines of Moria? The Balrog led him out, otherwise, he openly admits, he would not have known how to escape. What happens at the climax of The Lord of the Rings when Frodo makes it to Mount Doom to destroy the ring? He cannot do it. He is overcome by the ring! Only the evil character Gollum seems able to help him finish the job! So much for Frodo being a Christ figure…instead of overcoming evil, he himself is mastered by it and only saved from total failure by an evil creature’s intervention! These recurring themes are not the same as God bringing good out of evil, but rather dark forces and characters saving the day… and once they have served their purpose, they go away. This is not how God works! I know of no saint who credits the devil, Caiphas, Judas, or Pilate for putting Christ to death for our redemption! Rather, Christ allowed them to put Him to death so that He might bring the greatest good from it. He brought out the GOOD, not them. No pagan, naturalistic, humanistic …and least of all, occult forces ever lead Christ or His Church in accomplishing good! Yet, that is just what the Renaissance has led many to believe. This is a reversal or disorientation of God’s order.

Consider a few more points of contact between the occult and the works of Tolkien and Lewis. According to Theosophy, the devil and his companion angels were really just “solar Angels,” those advanced beings, who Theosophy claims descended (thus “the fall”) from Venus to earth eons ago to bring the principle of mind to what was then animal-man. They came to aid the evolutionary process along! In the theosophical perspective, the descent of these solar Angels was not a fall into sin or disgrace but rather an act of great sacrifice, as is suggested in the name “Lucifer” which means light-bearer. They came down to be with man and to help him evolve. Not surprisingly, these occult followers pick and choose from Scripture passages as well as other traditional works to make their case.

Turning to Tolkien, in the first section of his Silmarillion, the one god first created the Ainur, a group of eternal spirits or demiurges, called “the offspring of his thought” (this is pure Gnosticism). After three attempts to sing the song of creation together, with some singing not in harmony, the one god Ilúvatar then stopped the music and showed them a vision of Arda (what would eventually become Middle Earth with all its peoples). The vision disappeared after a while, and Ilúvatar offered the Ainur a chance to enter into Arda and govern over the new world.

Then Tolkien has many Ainur descending to take physical form and become bound to that world. The greater Ainur became known as Valar, while the lesser Ainur were called Maiar. The Valar attempted to prepare the world for the coming inhabitants (Elves and Men), while Melkor (one of the most powerful Ainur), who wanted Arda for himself, repeatedly destroyed their work; this went on for thousands of years until, through waves of destruction and creation, the world took shape. Each of the Ainur took up roles in certain places of Arda… the air, the seas, the earth and under the earth just as the pagan myths held. Can we not see here the great similarity with the occult doctrines? Higher powers descending… making a sacrifice, as it were, to be among men and elves in order to help them come into existence. It is significant that Tolkien has also identified under male or female genders… which again is occult… as they like to give the heavens and the earth sexual identities and all their demiurges genders. Of note also is how close this is to animism, which is the belief in a supernatural power that organizes and animates the material universe. Church doctrine tells us all this is erroneous and to be rejected! God created the universe and all its parts immediately….

Also, of note is how close these ideas are to the pagan myths. Tolkien has his Manwë, the Valar of the air, the greatest of the Valar, living and holding a court on top of the highest mountain of Arda. Does not Olympus come to mind? It is the highest mountain of Greece where Zeus, Apollo, Athena, Poseidon and others lived and ruled. Is this profoundly Christian? Rather, this comes from the occult! Thus, we should not be surprised at how much the occult, the New Agers, and others love these books!

Not surprisingly, Lewis has similar ideas presented in his Space Trilogy… wherein Dr. Ransom (who Lewis admits is really J.R.R. Tolkien) takes space flight to Venus and Mars. Like Tolkien, he too has certain spiritual powers descend to help take care of the worlds… calling them Eldila. We could also recall that in The Voyage of the Dawn Treader, there is the Island of the Star where “a fallen star” lives making reparation for some unnamed past misdeed. Fallen stars have always been considered first and foremost demons. Is Lewis promoting universal salvation… that even the devil will be somehow rehabilitated in the end? That is a constant theme in the occult… sympathy for satan. … that they are not really the rebellious and evil angels the Catholics have made them out to be! Yikes! On this same island Lewis has magical powers flowing freely as the children experiment with a book of spells sitting open in the library. Does this sound Catholic to anyone? A fallen star associated directly with a book of spells that really work! Dangerous times! Not only that, Lewis goes on to recount how the fallen star has a “daughter,” who ends up marrying the king. Also, when Aslan appears to Lucy - he asks her if she liked HIS book of magic spells! In The Horse and His Boy Lewis has the enemy turning into a donkey, but Aslan tells him that since he appealed to his god Tash, he will be healed in the temple of Tash next year. So much for the Catholic dogma of NO Salvation outside of Christ and His Church! Dangerous times!

A few more points of contact. When looking at the occult and those who give into it, one finds that they turn things upside-down. For example, the Church has traditionally held that hell, the home of the devils and place of eternal punishment, is deep down inside the earth… and near it are Purgatory and the Limbo of the Fathers. The occult turns that around…. Suddenly we find… down is good. There is much happiness down there, after all. In The Silver Chair, for example, Lewis has some gnome creatures being enslaved and brought up out of their own world deep under the earth. They are miserable until they are released and allowed to descend back down to their homes where they find complete happiness. I guess there is no hell in Narnia. Charles Manson was forever looking in Death Valley for a doorway down into a magical city in the earth below. Hummmm. Tolkien also gives some credence to this notion by showing the happiness of the dwarves in living below ground in huge underground cities and caves.

Although there are many more things we could look into, there is one remaining issue that captures the whole and exposes these myths for what they truly are… dangerous. Here I am thinking of the return of the ancient heresy of Gnosticism which we have already briefly touched upon. Dr. Wolfgang Smith in an article written for Homelitic and Pastoral Review explains that although there are various strange sects of Gnostics hanging about today… what is amazing is that its main tenets have become mainstream in modern culture. I propose this has happened in part because of the rise of the occult and its accompanying fantasy-like literature that we are now discussing.

Historically, Gnosticism is an ancient heresy (one of the earliest to attack the Church) that is not always easy to pin down because it is like our modern New Age… picking and choosing things from the all the systems of thought and belief at the time. It borrowed from Christianity, astrology, Persian religions, Jewish rabbinical and Talmudic ideas, Egyptian myths, and the Greek philosophy… everything… with individuals adding their own ideas as they went along. Thus, St. Irenaeus tells us: “Every day every one of them invents something new.” Scholars have counted up to thirty different speculative systems among the Christian-Jewish Gnostics. In a word, Quasten tells us, ancient Gnosticism is a mixture of Oriental religions and Greek philosophy. From the Oriental religions, Gnosticism separated God from His creation, the spiritual from the material, heaven from earth, soul from body… with the spiritual longing for liberation from the material. From Greek philosophy, Gnosticism picked up its speculative elements. Thus, the speculations concerning various mediators between God and the world were introduced from Neo-Platonism; a naturalistic kind of mysticism from Neo-Pythagoreanism; and the appreciation of the individual and his ethical task from Neo-Stoicism. So says Quasten (cf. Patrology, vol. 1, pp. 254-5).

Reflecting on these ancient forms of Gnosticism, Dr. Smith explains that it has indeed returned and displays three main doctrinal characteristics: (1) the Gnostic devaluation of the cosmos; (2) liberation through some form of mystic flight; (3) the need of special knowledge… gnosis.

With these we can now see how Tolkien’s myth is very much in keeping with Gnosticism as well as how this old heresy has returned in this moment of history. Let’s spend the rest of our time looking into these three factors to see how this is true.

We are living in a time when pseudo-science has risen to power, forcing itself upon us. It seems, nearly every scientist today must promote the various pseudo-systems that are steadily being proven to be false if he is going to keep his job. Copernicanism, Einstein’s relativity, Darwinism, and so on. This pattern is most clearly seen with Darwinian evolution, which is nothing but an ideological postulate masquerading in scientific garb. It is of philosophy, not science. It is of belief, not observation. In any case, all of these systems (taken alone or together) lead to a rather dim view of our cosmos. We have been (falsely) taught from childhood how we are completely accidental, not special, coming from a speck that blew up. All is relative. Yuk. Who wants to grow up in such a meaningless place? Then we are told how we came from another speck (single cell ameba) …and after ages and ages of painful mutations… death and disease, we humans finally arrived on the scene. Yuk. Who takes delight in being a part of such a process? Can we not see here, the devaluation of God’s cosmos?

This devaluation is also present in Tolkien’s myth in that Melkor is allowed to sow his seeds of disharmony and wreck the world. He explains in the Silmarillion how Melkor, who wanted Arda for himself, repeatedly destroyed the work of the good Valar…and this went on for thousands of years until, through waves of destruction and creation, until finally the world took shape. Does this sound like God’s creation that was perfect at the start… perfect!? All through The Lord of the Rings, there is a certain sense of doom hanging over the book… how Rivendell and Loth Lorien are the only places of safe harbor left… and even they are fading. Recall how even after the one evil ring is finally destroyed, these places continued to fade and all the trouble Frodo went through could not be overcome as long as he remained in Middle Earth. No matter how hard he tried, … his sleep was disturbed.

What is the logical conclusion? Take flight! Since man is stuck in this world, stuck with the status quo or our material reality, the only way out is a mystic journey. Have you ever read the short story, “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty?” He is frustrated with his miserable life and overburdened marriage…and off he goes on some incredible mystic flights. But there is more here than just escapism … because this is also tied in with the occult. Some examples: thirty-nine members of a new age group called “Heaven’s Gate” committed mass suicide on March 26, 1997, believing, according to the teachings of their cult, that through their suicides they were “exiting their human vessels” so that their souls could go on a journey aboard a spaceship they believed to be following comet Hale-Bopp. Mystic flight.

From 1994 to 1997, the Order of the Solar Temple’s members began a series of mass suicides, which led to something like 74 deaths. Farewell letters were left by members, stating that they believed their deaths would be an escape from the “hypocrisies and oppression of this world.” They believed by their suicide they were “moving on to the star, Sirius.” Mystic flight.

I remember listening to NPR shows while attending college in the 1980s. One of them interviewed a California man who claimed he could produce lucid dreams and then enter into them. Many others spoke of their out of body experiences. Mystic flight.

Although Tolkien rightly deplores suicide as a form of mystic flight as is seen in his character, Denathor, he nevertheless presents this element of modern Gnosticism. In The Lord of the Rings, Frodo, Elrond, Galadriel, Gandalf and others all had to take flight from the world like so many before them… they had to leave Middle Earth to find peace some place else in the West over the seas. They did not conquer but fled (notice, by the way, the direction they went… WEST… the opposite of what Catholics have always considered the holy direction. Anton Levae, in his directions on setting up altars for satanic worship, directed that they should always face West not East). Clearly, these books capture what is going on in the world at this present moment rather than God’s holy and timeless truths. Instead of showing the errors of our times, they go along with the errors. No wonder they are so popular!

Finally, the third element of gnosis…or special knowledge indicates how the mystic flight is actually accomplished. Think of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz… all she needed was the knowledge of how to use the silver slippers and off she went back home to Kansas. The New Age groups of Heaven’s Gate and the Order of the Solar Temple seemed to have special knowledge that if they committed suicide they would be taken on a space ship. Hummm. If you look into the supposed Marian apparitions of Mary Ann Van Hoof which occurred in Necedah, WI, you will find these amazing elements: We must sign up for a SPACE SHIP coming to take us away before the coming chastisement. According to the messages, this space-ship will take the faithful to, of all places, MIDDLE EARTH, where they will be spared the chastisement and then emerge to re-populate the world and establish Christ's TRUE CHURCH.

Dr. Smith carefully notes that what makes this knowledge “gnostic” is that it is a claim to something one does not really have. Those poor deluded people did not get on any space ship… It is all lies…error, heresy… tricks of the devil.

It is no secret that there are all kinds of special knowledge in and around the Tolkien Myth. Elrond and Gandalf and other enlightened ones are always speaking about esoteric things… secret knowledge, secret and hidden rings on their fingers, secret fires, and so on. And this knowledge is what enables them to do their difficult tasks and in the end to take their final mystic journey into the West, leaving behind troubled Middle Earth.

Even the advertising of Joseph Pearce’s lectures on The Lord of the Rings smells of this element of Gnosticism: “In this fascinating and insightful course, Joseph Pearce highlights theological significance encoded in the characters, objects and places of Middle-earth, unlocking the secrets of the most popular work of the 20th Century and the life of its author J.R.R. Tolkien.” … encoding… unlocking… secrets.

Recall how Quasten described Gnosticism … a mixture of Oriental religion with Greek philosophy. From the Oriental religions, Gnosticism separated God from His creation. Where is God in the workings of The Lord of the Rings? He is not mentioned! Theology always has God as its object. How can The Lord of the Rings be a “fundamentally religious and Catholic” work … “a theological thriller” when God is separated from the work?

Quasten goes on: From Greek philosophy, Gnosticism picked up its speculative elements. Thus the speculations concerning mediators between God and the world were introduced from Neo-Platonism. We have seen this in how the one god of Tolkien’s myth used the Valar to help him create Arda.

Quasten: Gnosticism has a naturalistic kind of mysticism from Neo-Pythagoreanism. All the mysticism in Tolkien’s myth is natural… it does not mention God… nor holiness, grace, faith, hope or charity.

Quasten: Gnosticism provides the appreciation of the individual and his ethical task from Neo-Stoicism. Much is made of the virtues of the Hobbits and Aragorn, Gandalf and so on. Yet ALL of their actions are of a natural virtue… nothing supernatural here. Again no faith, hope, or charity! No wonder Frodo was overcome by the ring! He did not have any supernatural help! Only the evil Gollum could help him!

I propose to you that these works are truly neo-gnostic to the very core and are not safe to read. They are well liked not only because as fantasy they provide a sort of mystic flight in these trying and troubling times, but also because many today can so easily identify with the story… in what has become a very Gnostic moment in history.

I would like to end this conference with an appeal to use our holy Faith as it has been given to us to use. We do not need to be looking outside of our Holy Church and True Religion for things to captivate our imagination and encourage us… In the lives of the saints we find more wonders than can be grasped in a life time. We find saints flying up to heaven in true mystical flights, whether it be in a fiery chariot of St. Elias or the levitations of St. Joseph Cupertino or the raptures of St. Teresa of Jesus. We have saints like Lydwine of Schiedam falling down on the ice at 15 only to lie on her bed for 38 years unable to eat or sleep, suffering every disease known except leprosy, all without dying. Yet her angel comes and off they go on some mystical journey to a church in Christendom, Purgatory or to speak with the saints who come to meet her in Eden. St. Antony of the Desert confronted the devil for years with incredible and intense stories to tell. Saints lived on the top of columns… walled themselves up in holes of the earth… doing fierce combat with the devil. A monk falling from the wall in the building of a monastery hangs in mid-air while St. Vincent Ferrer goes and asks permission to save him. A teenaged girl leads hardened men in historic battles to become the world’s greatest general. The crippled, blinded, hunchback Bd. Margaret of Costello is walled up in a church sacristy most of her life… and yet is so filled with joy that she is able to levitate, heal diseases and put out fires. We have saints like St. John Vianney living only on potatoes, not able to sleep because the devil plays a sort of band music all night while marching through the house, yet he is able to see into souls and Purgatory too… spending 15 hours on average in the confessional. And what of Bd. Anna Maria Taigi who could really see events of times present and future with a ball of light given her by God. A ball of fire descended into the heart of St. Philip Neri, breaking three of his ribs.

These are only a handful of wonders found in the lives of the saints. By reading and studying them, we are not making any claim on knowledge we do not have… but rather what has been given us. We are listening to Our King, the beloved Son of the Father, through His Saints. With this true knowledge from God, this true WORD, our faith, hope, and charity are greatly strengthened. Maybe this is why so few go this path. When reading the lives of the saints, there is grace available… God is there. We are confronted with outstanding examples of holiness… of people who are real… who are available to us even now… people who sought to make their own lives an incarnation of the ONE WORD OF GOD instead of their own word! Through these saints we see how the Gospel is lived in time and space. [With the saints we are not free to make of their lives what we want, for, in most cases, they were holy in all their life.] Instead we are shamed in our pettiness and pusillanimity, seeing ever more the need to detach from all that is worldly… of the flesh… and of the devil… We are confronted with need for conversion not in just what we like but in our whole life! Yikes. Not so with The Lord of the Rings and other myths… not so! For they do not promote the Gospel but rather are the productions of an extravagant imagination… of strange and occult words… thereby allowing the reader freely to pick and choose from these heresy-riddled fantasies what they like. In such works, not being of the Word of God made flesh, there is no compelling grace to live out of the Gospel of Jesus Christ Our Lord and King. And this is why 150 million can read these myths and not worry about becoming Catholic. Let us break free of these chains and walk free in the open light of Our God, and no longer to be numbered among those in the cave. “O [faithful of Christ], keep that which is committed to thy trust (Christ, the True Word of God), avoiding the profane novelties of words (myth), and oppositions of knowledge falsely so called (Gnosticism)” (1Tim 6:20).