Volume XII Number 1

Spring 1989

KING'S Theological Review

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A FAR-OFF GLEAM OF THE GOSPEL. SALVATION IN TOLKIEN'S *LORD OF THE RINGS*

COLIN GUNTON

I. Three worlds of imagery

Some years ago, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* was presented in dramatised form on the radio. In a preview of the production, two critics discussed what one of them called Tolkien's "flawed masterpiece". It was the reason given for the flaw which was of particular interest: what that great book lacks, one of them remarked, is a truly sacrificial death. There are, of course, deaths in the book, and, indeed, Gandalf goes through something like a death and resurrection in his fight with the Balrog. Whatever happens, and it seems that he does not die,[1] there is a near death and a resulting transfiguration. The interesting point, however, is not in the book, but in the fact that the critic made that remark. Why did he believe that in a heroic study of this kind there is something lacking if there is no sacrificial death? He was not, so far as I could see, speaking as a Christian. In any case, it has to be remembered that Tolkien asks that we do not attempt to see the book as a kind of Christian allegory (p. 8). Yet in some way or other, in our modern society which is supposed to have left religion behind, here was an apparently secular critic arguing for the necessity of this very religious component in a story. That is the puzzle with which I want to begin this paper.

The Lord of the Rings may not be an overtly theological book, but it is certainly in a broad sense about salvation. It is about the winning back of Middle Earth from the powers of evil. In that respect, of course, a large proportion of our art and literature is about salvation: about achieving the good life on the good earth. And in much of that art and literature three themes recur with remarkable regularity: "salvation", or the creation of the conditions of a truly human life on earth, is understood with the help of a range of imagery coming from three main sources.

The first we have met already: it is the idea of sacrifice. Why have so many cultures had the practice of sacrifice? Why is it that in our language the word *sacrifice* continues to recur in many contexts, even though in so changed a meaning from the original? I want to suggest that it is because it appeals to something very deep in our human experience of life in the world. It has to do, at least in part, with pollution and its removal. When we have done something of which we are ashamed, we often feel dirty or unclean. And not only ourselves: we know that the world around takes on something of the pollution. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has suggested that many of our hygiene rituals are often more than merely hygienic. The rigour and fervour with which they are often performed suggests that they appeal to something deeper: to an almost religious feeling of uncleanness which must somehow or other be wiped away.[2]

As we know from some of their tragic dramas, the Greeks believed that certain evil acts brought pollution on the cities where their perpetrators lived. Oedipus' murder of his father and marriage to his widowed mother, even though done – apparently – unawares, brought to his land a pollution which could not be cleansed until his guilt was admitted and requited – by a kind of sacrifice. The fact that these plays, like those of Shakespeare, still speak so profoundly to us, suggests that we meet here something universal in the human condition. The ancient Israelites went deeper, in a realisation that the sense of uncleanness derived from the disruption of their relation with their God. God is holy, and cannot bear to look on iniquity. Therefore if the worshipper is to come before him, there must be a cleansing. The sacrificial system developed partly to meet that need. It is significant that in sacrifice there must be offered to God nothing that is unclean: nothing that shares in the pollutedness it is designed to cleanse. If the worshipper is truly to come to God, uncleanness must be purged by means of a gift that is free from all taint. Sacrifice, then, is a notion that sees salvation in terms of the removal of pollution. More positively, it is about coming to our maker in the fullness of our humanity: of living before God and each other with the pure heart that cannot be achieved unless God provides the means of its cleansing.

The second way of speaking about salvation uses a range of notions taken from the lawcourt. Here, at the centre is not uncleanness but ideas of right and wrong. Just as we sometimes feel unclean when we have erred, here we feel that we have broken the law or the moral code. In some modern circles, that would be thought to be an old-fashioned way of speaking. Are not moral codes simply conveniences, ways of ordering society, or, if the taste be Marxist, the way by which the ruling classes persuade the proletariat to remain submissive? I would like to argue for the contrary: that it is impossible to maintain a total cynicism about systems of rules and laws, because without structures of law and morality we are unable to be human. Of course, laws do become burdensome, and are sometimes used by oppressive rulers to maintain their own interest. But without some form of order, some structure, the human being cannot be free. To have the kind of absolute freedom that existentialists sometimes recommend is a recipe for both nervous and social breakdown.

Indeed, part of the problem of the modern world, with its pervasive and disastrous[3] breakdown in belief in moral objectivity, is that the attempt has been made to live as if all values are centred in ourselves. Modern thinkers who urge shapeless, empty, freedom are in that respect at odds with the wisdom of the ages and the nature and needs of human community. What I have rashly called the wisdom of the ages is shown by the fact that almost all societies have believed that salvation has to do with living in harmony with the way that the universe is. It can be freely admitted that beliefs about what that is vary enormously, for that does not invalidate the main point: that the near universal experience of the human race is that the good life has something to do with living in the *right* way, and that out instinctive feelings of right and wrong are in some way related to that experience. To speak in such a way takes us some distance from direct appeal to legal metaphor and imagery, but that is because such direct appeal is not the chief concern of this paper. What is of interest in our context is the relation between conceptions of the kind of world we live in and our beliefs about right and wrong. In what sense are our human actions and choices to do with reality, and reality understood in a wide sense? We shall see that this is one of the concerns underlying Tolkien's writing.

The third set of pictures comes from the battlefield. According to this tradition, the world is a great battleground between good and evil, light and darkness, and therefore life is a battle in which we take one side or the other. Just as there have been many conceptions of the way right and wrong are written into the structure of things, there have been many expressions and understandings of the battle. Sometimes it has been held that there are two powers, of almost equal strength, who wage an eternal battle in which the human race is in some way involved. But, whatever the differences, the central concern remains the same: to see the moral life as a real struggle against evil and salvation as a kind of victory of light over darkness.

Once again, the Christian tradition has a distinctive way of expressing the matter. According to it, there is a battle, God's battle, to be fought. But because it is a battle God has won and is going to win, Christian theology has a distinctive understanding of the nature of evil. The powers of evil have, theologically, two characteristics. First, they are really evil: evil is not merely in the mind as some philosophers have suggested, but is a force which enslaves the good creation. Evil is an essentially alien power which corrupts and destroys the work of God, and so has to be destroyed. Despite this – and this is the second point – evil is not as real or as powerful as the good. It is something that exists only by feeding upon the good, like a parasite. So, according to the old traditions, devils are fallen angels: the good corrupted.

In this tradition of thought, however, evil is less real than good because it is destined to be destroyed. The outcome is that, according to the gospel, the Christian life is a kind of battle, fought in the light of the victory that God has already won. "Take therefore the whole armour of God . . ."; "Our fight is against principalities and powers . . ." (Ephesians 6.11f). Whatever the writer means by that, we can see that he is drawing on a universal or near universal human experience of evil as a foe to be conquered. If, as sometimes happens, we feel today that money, technocracy and the weapons of war threaten to take control of civilisation, we can share something of that world of thought. It is a way of understanding the plight of our world, apart from salvation and the grace of God. I believe, also, that it is from this particular world of imagery that Tolkien takes his chief cue in his great story, but that at the same time he is able to draw freely also on the two other clusters of metaphors that we have identified.

II

One way of understanding *The Lord of the Rings* is as a telling of the tale of the struggle against the powers of darkness that is life on earth. It is not, as we have seen, an explicitly Christian work. Yet it can be argued that it is indeed concerned with the universal human condition, as, in a different way, is the Christian faith. Is there any basis for such a claim in the work of Tolkien as a whole? That question must first be faced if such a theological treatment of Tolkien is not to appear a version of the allegorizing that he rejected. Two considerations in defence of a theological examination of *The Lord of the Rings* can be cited.

First there is evidence that Tolkien held a view that there are constant features to be found in human nature, constants that for him were reflected in the very existence and nature of language. T. A. Shippey refers to a remark of one of Tolkien's critics who was, he believes, somewhere close to the truth in "claiming that Tolkien was really interested in the eternal verities of human nature".[4] Despite this, Shippey points out that one must be very careful in using such terms, in view of the fact that Tolkien worked not from ideas but from words (so that any systematic theologian using his work as the means to a theological end must be exceedingly way). Yet "isn't there something underneath the nets of custom that remains the same?" (p. 67). Shippey believes that there is, and traces through some of Tolkien's writing what he calls a continuum of greed. Numerous characters display, in different forms, a form of this vice so that, "'the great corporate sin' (C. S. Lewis) of modernity must have had some ancient origin" (p. 68). That is to say, the shape that Tolkien's writing takes betrays at least awareness of some attempt at universality.

The second piece of evidence comes from Tolkien himself, and must again be used with caution in view of the essentially allusive way in which he speaks. In his paper "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien speaks of the artist's calling to be the creator of a "secondary world" which has its own truth and can at the same time throw light on the primary world in which we live. Or rather, and the choice of words is significant, the artist is not so much creator as *sub-creator.*[5] Such a distinction is essentially theological in content, for it suggests a belief that there is only one to whom we can ascribe the act of creation. The human artist can operate only at a secondary, lower, level, by divine gift. Humphrey Carpenter includes the following in his report or reconstruction of the famous conversation of September 19, 1931 between Tolkien, C. S. Lewis and Hugo Dyson. They are discussing the claim of Owen Barfield that myths, though beautiful and moving, are lies:

> *No*, said Tolkien. *They are not lies* . . .
>
> Man is not ultimately a liar. He may pervert his thoughts into lies, but he comes from God, and it is from God that he draws his ultimate ideals . . . Not merely the abstract thoughts of man *but also his imaginative inventions* must originate with God, and in consequence reflect something of eternal truth. In making a myth, in practising "mythopoeia" and peopling the world with elves and dragons and goblins, a story-teller . . . is actually fulfilling God's purpose, and reflecting a splintered fragment of the true light.[6]

Armed with such encouragement, but realising also its limits, I shall proceed to observe *The Lord of the Rings* through the eyes given by the gospel, and suggest all kinds of interesting parallels between the two.

The first – and most obvious – point is that the book is about a titanic struggle between the powers of good and evil. On the one side are the forces of light: the free people, hobbits, those men who have not fallen into the thralldom of the Dark Lord and various other groups – groups that are often at odds with each other in the normal run of things. Over against these are the servants of Sauron, the Dark Lord, whose aim is to bring all into subjection to himself. The power of Sauron derives from the ring of power, which he forged long ago, but which has gone missing, found, apparently accidentally, by the hobbit Bilbo Baggins during an earlier quest. As the story opens, the powers of evil are regrouping, building up their strength after an earlier defeat. Their final victory depends upon the recovery of the ring: and that, as they are beginning to discover, is in the distant land of the Shire.

Frodo's quest is to destroy the power of the Dark Lord by taking the ring from the Shire and casting it down the furnace where it was forged, in the very heart of the enemy's domain. The way he goes about it is strongly marked by Christian notions. If we recall Jesus' temptation by the devil to worship him and gain power over all the cities of the world, we shall see the point of Frodo's behaviour. Again and again, actors in the drama are tempted to use the ring to overcome the Dark Lord. But Frodo, taught by Gandalf who, like him, has some of the marks of a Christ figure, realises that to use evil, even in the battle against evil, is to become enslaved by it. The Dark Lord might be overcome, but those who overcome him will in their turn be corrupted into playing the same role. The ring enslaves those who use it, even those who lust after it, as the tragedy of Boromir demonstrates. Similarly, Gollum, the wretched creature from whom Bilbo had first stolen the ring, is totally eaten up and destroyed by its evil power. Early in the story, it becomes evident that Bilbo himself has used the ring so much that without virtually being forced to do so by Gandalf, he could not give it up. It unaccountably finds its way from the mantelpiece where it was to be left for Frodo, not yet in its power, back into Bilbo's pocket, and there is a struggle of wills before he can be persuaded to give it up (pp. 45f). Thus at the very outset we are given indications of the dread power that the ring exerts upon all who come near it.

At the other end of the story, at the crack of doom where the ring is to be cast for its destruction, we find that Frodo has so long carried the hideous article that he has joined those in thrall to the ring and cannot voluntarily give it up. It is perhaps the most brilliant and sure touch of the author that he leaves it to the even more enslaved Gollum to bite the ring from Frodo's finger, and, falling into the inferno, to find for himself the rest of death and for the world release from the evil power. Here we see two themes that awake echoes from Christian thought. First, is the fact that, although the opportunity to kill Gollum had presented itself often enough, Frodo had refused to give in to what was little more than a desire for revenge, just as Jesus had resisted his own particular temptations. Had he succumbed, the outcome could not have been the same. And second, there is the fact pointed out by my colleague, Brian Horne, that here we have a kind of doctrine of providence. Gandalf has already predicted that Gollum may have his own positive contribution to make to the outcome of the story (p. 73). The fact that when Frodo, enslaved at the last, cannot free himself of his obsession, it is the despised and wretched creature through whom release comes, is the work of a providence for whose working we have been prepared in previous stages of the story.

And there is something more to be said about the parallels between this aspect of the story and Christian theology. We noted before that evil is parasitic upon the good: it has an awful power, it corrupts and destroys, and yet has no true reality of its own. So it is with Tolkien's depiction of evil. The ring-wraiths represent some of the most horrifyingly evil agencies in literature. They are wraiths, only half real, but of a deadly and dreadful power. Their cries evoke despair – the incapacity to act – and terror in the forces of light. Their touch brings a dreadful coldness, like the coldness of Dante's hell. And yet they are finally insubstantial. When the ring is melted in the furnaces of Mount Doom, they "crackled, withered, and went out" (p. 982). Similarly, just as the devils of Christian mythology are fallen angels, so all the creatures of the dark Lord are hideous parodies of creatures from the true creation: goblins of elves, trolls of those splendid creatures, the ents, and so on (p. 507). Evil is the corruption of good, monstrous in power yet essentially parasitic.[7]

But the most marked parallel with Christian thought is to be found at the very heart of the story. *The Lord of the Rings* can best be seen as a telling of a tale of the battle of light against darkness, good against evil, which has interesting parallels to and borrowings from Christian theology. Like Jesus, Frodo goes into the heart of the enemy's realm in order to defeat him. And like him he is essentially weak and defenceless in worldly terms, but finally strong and invincible because he refuses to use the enemy's methods. The hobbits could almost be seen as childish or clownish figures but for the repeated references to their underlying physical and moral endurance. Their smallness and weakness become their strength, because the rulers of this age overlook them, so that the stone that was rejected becomes the head of the corner. Again and again we are reminded of biblical texts about the way the power of God works not through the great forces of history but throught the cross. Too much must not be made of this, of course. But it seems to me that Tolkien's depiction of the war of good against evil has too many interesting parallels with the biblical story of Christ's victory on the cross to be ignored.

Nor should it be forgotten that there are aspects of the story that echo the two other ways of speaking of salvation also. Whatever the point made by the radio critic, there is an element of sacrifice. At the end of the story, it becomes clear that Frodo has worn himself out in the struggle, and departs, in a kind of death, across the waters from the Grey Havens. It is not a sacrificial death, but something very like it. He has worn himself out in the struggle with evil, and does not live to enjoy the new peace and contentment he has brought to the Shire. He is like Moses in seeing but not enjoying the promised land, for he is too worn to return to the old life. Similarly, if I am right in seeing a link between sacrifice and cleansing, it is to be noted that there is a chapter called "The Scouring of the Shire". The escaping forces of evil, represented by the wizard corrupted by greed and ambition, make their way to the Shire and pollute it, destroying nature and introducing into the Shire pointless and filthy industries. Equally significant is the fact that wherever the servants of Sauron are to be found, there is pollution and decay. The orcs wantonly destroy trees. Like the renegade wizard, Saruman (p. 494), the orcs do not care for growing things, but delight in wanton destruction. In and near the land of Mordor, all is devastation and decay: it is a very abomination of desolation. The last part of Frodo's journey into Mordor is over a dead and dreary land, virtually empty of plant life and the water that maintains it in being. Where evil conquers, there is filth, devastation and death. Frodo's great sacrifice is to have taken the weight of that foulness upon him in order to cleanse the land for the return of life.

Again, if justice in the broader sense is about living in peace with the neighbour, each under vine and fig tree, we see also a concern for righteousness in Tolkien's vision of the scoured Shire. No doubt Tolkien's vision of life in the Shire owes something to idealised pictures of rural England, but that should not detract from the chief point. The hobbits are an idealised – and sometimes rather sentimentalised? – version of the meek who shall inherit the earth. They are not interested in world domination, or economic and technological development for its own sake. The great battle was fought to enable hobbits and men to live in peace in their homes; it was to provide the conditions for the development of community.[8] Perhaps it is here that we can discern another central Christian influence on Tolkien's writing. At the heart of the Christian gospel is the concern with persons. To be human is to be a person in relation with other persons, a way of being that is possible only when the relationship is restored by the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross and the triumph crowned by his resurrection from the dead.

Tolkien's strength here is to have seen something of the importance of the person. To fall into the power of the evil one is to be depersonalised. Nowhere is this better illustrated than by the portrait of the herald of Sauron who rides to meet the army of Gondor as it waits apparently foolhardily at the gates of Mordor. "The Lieutenant of the Tower of Baradûr he was, and his name is remembered in no tale; for he himself had forgotten it, and he said: 'I am the mouth of Sauron'" (p. 922). To serve the power of evil is to lose one's name, that which we gain by virtue of our loving relationship with others: it is to enter a slavery in which our very identity is taken away. Similarly, wherever the Dark Lord's influence is felt, human relations are in danger. His power is to be found even among his foes, where it causes friends to fall out and quarrel (p. 366), but, more notably, in the fact that his own servants fight each other savagely. Evil alienates and destroys. It is against the depersonalising of Middle Earth with its accompanying slavery, pollution and lawlessness that the titanic battle takes place.

There are, of course, elements of magic and militarism in the tale which prevent us from taking it with too literal an allegorising. But underlying the whole is a sure sense that evil is a continuing threat which has to be fought. Frodo's achievement, like Christ's, is eschatological but not the eschaton. The possibility of a return to slavery remains, as the words of Gandalf make clear:

> Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron himself is but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to muster all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule (p. 913).

III

Those words of Gandalf are like the allusions we have discerned in *The Lord of the Rings* to the action of providence: they take us near, but not quite, to theology proper. The stopping short is as it should be, for, as we have seen, Tolkien does not write as a theologian but as the teller of a story. In that telling he shares the directedness of so much art and literature to the theme of salvation, understood in its broadest sense. In the previous section there were outlined his use not only of the great theme of the battle of light against darkness, but also of other images of salvation. It was also shown that other echoes of Christian theology were to be discerned: the ways in which Frodo's bearing and behaviour echo that of Christ, and the overall concern for the reconciliation of persons in the context of a redeemed earth. What are the main differences that are to be seen?

The first is considerable. In the opening chapter of Ephesians, there is set before us a vision of salvation, which, the author makes clear, is not simply some religious idea but the completion of the creator's work for the whole creation: "a purpose . . . to unite all things in (Christ), things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1.9f). There we see immediately a radical difference from Tolkien's tale. The latter does sometimes reveal a nostalgic pessimism: the old order has gone, is tired and soiled, and will never return. Elves will disappear, and the richness of Middle Earth diminish. It is a rather backward looking vision: the best was in the past, and will not return. By contrast, the vision of Ephesians is eschatological, and reminds us that hope is a primary Christian virtue. The creation looks forward to an end. It has, indeed, been subjected to futility, so that it groans like a woman in childbirth, but the work of Christ is at once to restore and to perfect.

The second major difference is that in the Christian version of the three great themes they are transfigured; take new and radically different shape by being understood through the lens provided by the life and death of Jesus. The crucial point here is that for Christian soteriology that life and death are not simply the victory of a man against temptation, the sacrificial death of a man on behalf of others and the death of the just who dies for the unjust. They are indeed all of these things. But they are also much more. As all of those things they are the act and involvement of God in and for our world. The victory over evil gains its universal significance by virtue of the fact that it is the power of God exercised through the weakness and suffering of a man. The sacrifice that is the cleansing of the earth is God's giving up to death of his Son, the one through whom the world was made, so that the creation may also through him be brought to its completion. The death of the just for the unjust is undergone in order that relationships we destroy by our injustice may be forgiven and rebuilt. What Tolkien helps us to see, by both illumination and contrast, is that in the light of the cross of the Lord all the three themes are transfigured.

In both illumination and contrast it is noteworthy that the diagnosis of the ill is very similar: fearful and demonic evil, and the whole creation in thrall to desolating pollution and war. Tolkien's story can accordingly be seen as a vivid portrayal of the universal effects of human sin, countered with a mythological and highly illuminating account of their overcoming. What is different in the Christian scheme is the twofold emphasis: that such evil can be defeated and cleansed only by God, and that it can be done also only by a truly representative child of Adam. At the heart of the matter is the incarnation. The cleansing and completion of the creation comes about when the eternal Word of God, through whom all things were made, took flesh so that he might himself, as true man, bring together God and world which evil had sundered. Interestingly enough, there is even a kind of parallel to this in Tolkien's myth. "What was Gandalf? In what far time and place did he come into the world, and when would he leave it?" (p. 787: echoes of some the language Jesus uses of himself in John's Gospel).

What the Christian Gospel offers, by contrast, is not myth, but incarnation. God comes not to fight some mythological battle, but to engage as man in the heart of the human struggle for righteousness. And it is around that man that a community is formed, as his body, to realise the salvation that he won. That is why the Christian faith is concrete in a different way from *The Lord of the Rings*. The latter gains its strength, as we have seen, in part from its embodying in a story of universal appeal features which both answer to and illuminate the world in which we live. It is myth in the best sense of the word, encapsulating in concrete narrative central ways in which the human quest for salvation comes to expression. The former is concrete in that it embodies in a lived form not so much a quest for salvation as the recapitulation of human life in the victory, sacrifice and justification which is the life, death and resurrection of the incarnate Word.

The conclusion of this paper is, therefore, that the two focuses of its argument, Tolkien's masterpiece and the Christian tradition of atonement theology, can be mutually illuminating. Both are allowed to be what they separately are: a great story and a theology of salvation. Yet the story without doubt borrows from the Christian tradition in which its writer stood, while the theology cannot be expressed except in the metaphors which the literature of humanity provides. A final point brings the two even closer together, and provides something of a justification from Tolkien himself of the rash enterprise here attempted. At the close of "On Fairy Stories" Tolkien himself reflects on the distinctive "joy" that is the outcome of successful fantasy. It can be, he says, "a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium* in the real world", so that it may even enable us better to understand the true gospel:

> The birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The resurrection is the eucatastrophe of the story 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.[9]

May not, then, one reason for taking Tolkien's splendid tale seriously theologically be that it is in so many respects "a far-off gleam or echo of *evangelium*"; perhaps, indeed, not so very far-off a gleam?[10]

NOTES

1. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. Three parts in one volume, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1968, pp. 523f. Whether he dies is not clearly stated in his narrative of the struggle, though compare p. 536: "I have not passed through fire and death to bandy crooked words . . ." and p. 607: "I am Gandalf the White, who has returned from death". Further references to the work will be in parentheses in the text.
2. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984 (first edition, 1966), pp. 29-40.
3. See especially Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth, 1981, and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*. London, Duckworth, 1988; and Allan Bloom. *The Closing of the American Mind*, London: Penguin, 1988.
4. T. A. Shippey, *The Road to Middle Earth*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1982, p. 19.
5. J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", in *Tree and Leaf*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1964, pp. 11-70 (pp. 43-50).
6. Humphrey Carpenter, *The Inklings. C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and their Friends*. London: Allen and Irwin, 1978, p. 43. See also *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Ed. H. Carpenter, London: Allen and Unwin, 1981, p. 144: "Myth and fairy story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world".
7. It will be seen from these remarks that I find somewhat more consistent a theology of evil in *The Lord of the Rings* than does Shippey, who seems to me to make the mistake of drawing too absolute a distinction between "inner" and "objective" evil, op. cit. pp. 107-111.
8. "C. Williams who is reading it all says the great thing is that its *centre* is not in strife and war and heroism (though they are understood and depicted) but in freedom, peace and ordinary life and good living. Yet he agrees that these very things require the existenced of a great world outside the Shire – lest they should grow stale by custom and turn into the humdrum . . ." Tolkien, *Letters* pp. 105f.
9. "On Fairy Stories", op. cit., pp. 62f.
10. I am grateful to Francis Watson for criticism of a first draft of this paper, as a result of which it is, I believe, much better than it would otherwise have been.