

Heroism is a very important theme in Literature. It is a very significant theme in Tolkien's writings. *The J.R.R. Tolkien Handbook* has some profound things to say about it. Here we reprint - with proper documentation - the entry on **heroism**:

"Tolkien's concept of heroism deserves careful study. He has been able (for those who can enter his imaginary world) to create convincing heroes that are more biblical than superhuman. In Tolkien's Middle-earth, ultimately the meek inherit the world. C.S. Lewis puts his finger on the main characteristic of heroism in Tolkien's mythology, that apparent foolishness is the method of providence, that imagination wins over brute strength. The method of heroism is a God who becomes a humble carpenter.

"In both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the ways of providence, often managed and interpreted by Gandalf, are to use unheroic humble figures like Bilbo, Frodo, Sam and Merry, in a heroic manner. The world is to be saved by humble ordinary people, not the mighty, powerful, and wise. But there are 'heroic' heroes as well, with qualities that redefine greatness. Aragorn is a figure who can stand with the great heroes of legend. Yet he is marked by gentleness, humility and a gift of healing. Though the setting is pre-Christian, he is a Christian hero and king. In him high qualities more often than not associated with the Elves are softened and humanized."

"Significantly, Tolkien's heroes are not autonomous and individualistic. (Where they are, as in Turin, this is accounted a tragic flaw.) They are helped by providence, and by Gandalf the wizard; Frodo is helped by Sam, Beren by Luthien, . . .

"Aragorn combines many heroic qualities. He is a Christ-like true king, whose return is heralded in ancient prophecy. He is healer, guardian (as Ranger) and wise man as well as warrior, whose command even the dead acknowledge.

Stewardship is also a heroic quality valued in Tolkien's world. So is sacrifice. Aragorn and the free defenders of Minas Tirith are willing to sacrifice their lives in hopeless battle to distract Sauron's attention from Frodo, the Ringbearer, and Sam. Frodo and Sam are willing to give their lives to destroy the Ring."<sup>1</sup>

Along with the saints, of course, aren't these characters the kind of persons we would want our children to know and imitate? Of course, with Tolkien's heroes (and the world of Middle-earth) being so biblical, it couldn't possibly be otherwise!

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<sup>1</sup> Colin Duriez, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Handbook* (Grands Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002) 113-115.