

In his masterful work on Tolkien, Joseph Pearce makes a very pertinent remark:

One cannot afford to ignore Tolkien's philosophical and theological beliefs, central as they are to his whole conception of Middle Earth and the struggles within it, but on the other hand one can enjoy Tolkien's epic without sharing the beliefs which gave it birth. This of course is evident from the many millions who have read and enjoyed Tolkien's books without sharing his Christianity.¹

Has any one of you ever had the thrill of hearing a friend or acquaintance, maybe one who is not Catholic or even Christian, say something like the following? "Wow! I saw the movie *The Lord of the Rings*; it was **great!** In a way, the real world is scary and yet exciting - just like Middle-earth - full of danger and peril and true friendship and great deeds of love and heroism by decent people." Perhaps then you thought something like this: "Wow! I feel that way too. Maybe - just maybe - my friend is on his way to being a Catholic Christian - a follower of *the King*, just like me!"

Not very long ago, in one of my classes, I was thrilled when the priest-professor said that the writings of Tolkien can be used as a great pre-evangelization tool. That means that the stories of Tolkien can plant the seed and water the field for the growth of the crop that is a birth of Christianity and Catholicism in the soul of a human being. It is not far fetched! Whatever the circumstances of one's birth and upbringing and beliefs, all of us are sons of one Father, God our Creator. The honest Roman pagan Cicero came to believe in the existence of God merely by observing the perfect design and order of the stars and the whole universe. All of us have the natural law imprinted on our hearts. We are all brethren: we are children of the Father, who is the source of our very being!

"Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* [emerged] as the 'greatest book of the century' in a poll of more than 25,000 people throughout Britain."² Wow! To put this in perspective, several hundred years ago, with the apostacy of King Henry VIII, England ceased to be a Catholic country and a Defender of the true Church. Furthermore, the world in general is much less God-oriented than it was five hundred years ago, and that includes the British Isles. So this survey is quite an achievement. That a "secular" person and a Christian can share a similar idea that is - on the surface of it - decent and human and engaging, but deep down is

¹ Joseph Pearce, *Tolkien: Man and Myth* (Great Britain: Harper Collins, 1998) 100.

² *Ibid.* 1.

essentially Christian – this is exciting! We can detect this excitement in a quote from philosopher Peter Kreeft:

If the antireligious person loves this story [LOTR], he must unconsciously love the Christian story, not because *The Lord of the Rings* is an allegory of Christianity but because its author's mind and philosophy are one with that of the Author of the Christian story.³

Truly! Divine Providence is at work here.

³ Peter J. Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005) 68.