

A Holy Party: Holiness in *The Hobbit*

NICHOLAS J. S. POLK

In a previous article written for the 2016 Winter Issue of *Mallorn*,¹ I argued that a proper understanding of patience, holiness, and humility, as what I believe Tolkien understood those words to mean, would allow a greater understanding of Tolkien himself, his legendarium, and the rest of his works. My primary vehicle for conveying this understanding was through *The Lord of the Rings*. My main purpose with *The Lord of the Rings* was to utilize it as a proof for my argument along with other supports. I argued that the reader of *The Lord of the Rings* would be able to see holiness running throughout the story by interpreting a few examples of holy events within it.

Similarly, I intend to launch an examination of holiness found within *The Hobbit* and its relation to the entirety of the legendarium. I will be referring to what Corey Olsen calls the Assimilation version of *The Hobbit*.² This examination will be primarily substantiated by arguments made in my previous article, i.e., what I believe to be a particular aspect of Tolkien's own understanding of holiness (which I believe to be inherent in his being Roman Catholic), and with pericopes from Tolkien's works, his letters, and with other explanations pertaining to the subject at hand belonging to both Tolkien scholars and theologians. My aim here is to arouse the reader to some oft neglected parts of Tolkien the author, and his works, in order to build on one's own comprehension of *The Hobbit*.

I When reading the famous opening lines, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit," I cannot help but think that this sentence evokes a sense of holiness in its readers. The word "holiness" is too often, and narrowly, interpreted as something that evokes a sense of powerful awe or doom, or something that is completely separated by all other things by supernatural purity. While these interpretations are not wrong, they are part and parcel to a more comprehensive conception of what holiness is. I argue that a biblical grasp of holiness is integrally wrapped up in humility. To be holy is to be awesome, compelling, and have a sense of "wholly otherness", but one misses out on all that holiness has to offer when regarded as not being woven into the fabric of humility. These first ten words are a first look into the holiness that may be found throughout *The Hobbit*.

The Narrator opens the hobbit's porthole-like door to the world of Bilbo Baggins. Here, we learn who Bilbo is, about some of his family history, and more about his home under The Hill and across The Water. Bilbo is a simple hobbit living in a simple neighborhood—a kind of holy paradise, if you will. What readers of Tolkien will come to know as "The Shire" is a place that is separate from a world inhabited by trolls, goblins, and dragons. Bilbo is living a holy life in a

holy place. "Holiness is not a stagnant reality, however. It is a state of being in which its practitioner is continually reoriented towards the will of the Good..."³ And in the foreshadowing fashion of Tolkien, we are given a glimpse into Bilbo's anticipated transformation: "you could tell what a Baggins would say on any question without the bother of asking him. This is a story about how a Baggins had an adventure, and found himself saying and doing things altogether unexpected."⁴ From the beginning we know that Bilbo's life and reputation are going to be altered in a substantial way.

Holiness is not only a state of being, but is also a dynamic reality that nudges its holder to continually improve upon themselves. It is the holy person's response to that nudge that determines whether or not their alteration is one of positive or negative proportions: the positive being the surrender to the will of the Good despite one's self and the negative being succumbing to self-centeredness, or self-righteousness. I believe that here, Tolkien communicates to his audience that Bilbo is at a pivotal area of his life where transformation is not *just* going to happen, but that it also *needs* to happen. Readers soon discover that Bilbo is an essential part of the Unexpected Party that he belongs to, and that the success of his party hinges on the choices he decides to act upon. We may be able to see this by observing the tension between Bilbo's Baggins and Took natures.⁵

II

Throughout the story Bilbo's thoughts and actions are either attributed to his Tookish side or his Baggins side. Readers are given phrases such as: "something Tookish woke up inside him" and "the Baggins part regretted what he did..." and "the Took side had won."

Whenever Bilbo is feeling cowardly or regretful about the contents of his journey, he is guilty of letting his Bagginess direct his emotions. Bilbo begins to revert to his Baggins side when things get difficult. He desires the nostalgia of home and comfortability. This reaction can be seen in the episode where Bilbo first enters The Lonely Mountain to search for the treasury of Erebor: "You went and put your foot right in it that night of the party, and now you have got to pull it out and pay for it! Dear me, what a fool I was and am!" said the least Tookish part of him."⁶

Oppositely, when Bilbo performs courageously, he is inspired by his Took make-up. An instance of this Tookish courage resides in Bilbo's reflection on Ravenhill during Bolg's renewed attack on the alliance of men and elves: "He had taken his stand on Ravenhill among the Elves—partly because there was more chance of escape from that point, and partly (with the more Tookish part of his mind) because if he was going to be in a last desperate stand, he preferred on the whole to defend the Elvenking."⁷ Bilbo has come a

long way from going without handkerchiefs or his armchair!

The tug-o-war that seems to be taking place between Bilbo's Took and Baggins side is not one of a definite dichotomy, however. Though there may be tension between the two natures, they are closely bound up in one another. Perhaps it is possible that the Baggins' want for comfort is not an evil inclination that drags Bilbo to a spoiled version of himself, and, on the other hand, maybe the Took's appetite for adventure is not a supreme way of being meant to replace the Baggins element within Bilbo. Instead, it may be possible that Bilbo's reminiscence of homey comforts serves as a sort of catalyst towards bravery. As Bilbo reprimands himself in the tunnel leading to the dragon-hoard for beginning a journey that perhaps he would not return from, he continues on anyway. This action of continuing down this passage is described as "the bravest thing he ever did."⁸ The reconciliation of both natures is noticeable on Ravenhill. Both the Took and Baggins sides seem to be harmoniously present in the decision-making of Bilbo. I believe there is evidence here that shows a holy transformation of both familial parts that ultimately moves Bilbo to being a more holistic hobbit.

In light of Bilbo's transformation being viewed in this way, one may be reminded of the similarities Bilbo shares with Aulë in his premature making of the dwarves, in anticipation of the coming of the Children of Ilúvatar. Just as Aulë's desire to sub-create was intended to be, so may Bilbo's sub-creative Baggins nature be intrinsic to his being.⁹ Perhaps Bilbo is not morally corrupt in his loving of comfortability just as Aulë is not for his desire to create. That is not to say that these naturally good aspects are impervious to corruption, or that Bilbo and Aulë's situations are entirely identical. If Bilbo had entirely rejected the Party's call to adventure to cling to his belongings or if Aulë had haughtily attempted to defend and keep his dwarves, then one may possibly call these acts "sinful." This is alluded to when Ilúvatar gives the caution, "Love not too well the works of thy hands and the devices of thy heart..."¹⁰ But Ilúvatar does affirm the truth that sub-creation is a part of his creatures' natures when he extends compassion in response to Aulë's humble reminder: "Yet the making of things is in my heart from my own making be thee; and the child of little understanding that makes a play of the deeds of his father may do so without thought of mockery, but because he is the son of his father."¹¹ Ilúvatar recognizes the necessary sub-creative nature of Aulë, but gracefully criticizes him, which leads him to participate with others in the creation of Arda even if the future's fruition is to arrive unexpectedly. By the same token, Bilbo's home is an inheritance from his father, Bungo, who expressed his sub-creativity in the embellishment of Bag End. Bilbo has taken up the sub-creative torch from his father to continue the further beautification of his family home. Similar to Ilúvatar's challenge to Aulë, it is Gandalf who comes to challenge Bilbo to pursue the wholeness that his adventurous vulnerability, represented by his Tookish nature, brings to the table.

III

I think a question to ask at this stage is, 'what are the

primary means by which holiness is extended, if indeed an element of holiness lies at all within the text?' I believe there are three primary ways by which holiness acts in *The Hobbit*: 1) Through a personal and incarnate agent, 2) through music, and, finally, 3) through "luck," as Tolkien means it in *The Hobbit*, i.e., the providence of Ilúvatar.

A

In our exploration of holy agents, I think that it is safe to establish Gandalf as the main point of interest. I will not be unpacking other possible emissaries of holiness such as Elrond and The Eagles, but I will not ignore that, though their appearance is short in *The Hobbit*, they serve a great deal in the aiding of holiness in the standalone story, as well as in relation to the rest of the legendarium.

It is fitting that Gandalf is the first, and chief, instigator of holiness in *The Hobbit*. His quick wit and inclination for wisdom is matched by few. Much ink has been employed to the discourse on Gandalf's challenging of Bilbo's "polite nothings," so that Bilbo may actually reflect on his words before speaking them, therefore assisting in Bilbo's personal growth. I think that touching further on this discussion would be redundant, but I do not want to miss the opportunity to acknowledge the importance that the incident at Bilbo's front door contains in regards to his maturation in holiness.¹² My focus on Gandalf will consist of why I believe that he is the epitome of holiness, and other examples of where his holy nature can be seen enacted and where its impact has landed elsewhere.

In my previous article, I have presented why I believe patience to be an essential part of holiness. Under the present criteria Gandalf, from his inception in the Ainulindalë to his etymological derivation, belongs to the designation of holy. In the Valaquenta, we are given the name that Gandalf was first known by: Olórin. We are also given a description of his character: "Wisest of the Maiar was Olórin. He too dwelt in Lórien, but his ways took him often to the house of Nienna, and of her he learned pity and patience."¹³ With this passage, supplemented with Christopher Tolkien's compilation of notes that make up *Unfinished Tales*, we may catch an even closer glimpse of Gandalf's potentially holy nature. Tolkien writes of the Istari and their coming to Middle-earth that "coming in shapes weak and humble were bidden to advise and persuade Men and Elves to good, and to seek to unite in love and understanding all those whom Sauron, should he come again, would endeavor to dominate and corrupt." He further explicates upon Gandalf's arrival to Middle-earth, "But Círdan from their first meeting at the Grey Havens divined in him the greatest spirit and the wisest..."¹⁴ Shortly following the previous statements, the reader discovers that Gandalf is one who opposes evil with "the fire that kindles" rather than "the fire that devours."¹⁵ These holy characteristics might emerge from the etymology of Olórin, which is derived from the Quenya *olos* meaning "dream, vision." The note on this lays out the High-elven understanding of the word, "*olo-s*: vision, 'phantasy:' Common Elvish name for 'construction of the mind' not actually (pre)

existing in Eä apart from the construction, but by the Eldar capable of being by Art (*Karmë*) made visible and sensible. *Olos* is usually applied to *fair* constructions having solely an artistic object (i.e. not having the object of deception, or of acquiring power).¹⁶ Reading Gandalf's origin in this way, one may be tempted to say that Gandalf was destined to be an agent of holiness.

We may see Gandalf's various aspects of holiness on

display throughout the Party's journey. In light of the notes quoted above, we may also be able to see that holiness is something that awakens others to what Tolkien calls "artistic vision." Another name for this artistic vision might also be "the will of the Good." We can see Gandalf's awakening and unifying work on display in his gathering of the party at Bag End. Not only does Gandalf assemble both Bilbo and the dwarves for a noble cause, but he does so in a way that



bestows ennoblement to the members of the party—particularly Bilbo and Thorin. Thorin arrives on scene with a regal entrance. The reader is meant to know that Thorin comes from royalty. Thorin’s words and actions carry a haughty and dignified tone to them. There does not seem to be anything that Thorin is not an expert about. After all, he comes from a line of kings. Bilbo, on the other hand, is an exemplary citizen of The Shire and that is good enough for him. Gandalf addresses both Thorin’s arrogance and Bilbo’s apathy when everyone present expresses doubt about Bilbo’s capabilities as a burglar, “If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself.”¹⁷ The reader misses out on all that Gandalf’s statement has to offer when treated as a mere rebuke. Not only does Gandalf fall guilty of foreshadowing, as Gandalf is prone to do, but plants a sort of holy seed in the members of the Party. Bilbo has the potential to be so much more than just a well-to-do hobbit, and I would draw a parallel to Thorin with this statement. Thorin is capable of so much more than solely being a dwarven monarch. Gandalf has given an alternate perspective, and Gandalf will continue to patiently and humbly nurture his recipients in assisting them on their holy quest.

Both Bilbo and Thorin’s holiness bloom preceding and following The Battle of the Five Armies. For Bilbo, this is evident in his negotiations with Thranduil and Bard in an attempt to prevent an all-out war amongst the Men, Elves, and Dwarves. Our Mr. Baggins has come from a place where even the thought of danger possessed him to fall on the ground “shaking like a jelly that was melting”¹⁸ to being a hobbit “more worthy to wear the armour of elf-princes than many that have looked more comely in it.”¹⁹ He is an adventurer who commands the situation with bravery and honor. Bilbo seeks to achieve a parley with no selfish gain in mind. To even meet with the Elves and Men, with the Arkenstone as a bargaining chip, is to do so at the risk of Bilbo’s life, his share of the treasure, and his standings with his stunted comrades. Similar to Frodo’s volunteering to take the Ring of Power to Mount Doom at the Council of Elrond, Bilbo offers the Arkenstone in a way that sees beyond himself.

The culmination of Thorin’s holy transformation is manifested in his final goodbye to Bilbo: “I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate.” It is a sad thing that Thorin waits to humble himself before a friend on his deathbed, but in light of his inevitable passing, Thorin has indeed become more than just King Under the Mountain. Without the obstacles of wealth or pride to cloud his sight, he experiences true sanctification. Bilbo also demonstrates his growth by honoring Thorin by addressing him as a king. Bilbo had every right to deliver Thorin a well-deserved “I told you so,” but instead, he exalts Thorin at the expense of himself. Thorin responds in a most holy fashion: “There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier

world.”²⁰ Any sign of Thorin’s previous haughtiness seems to have disappeared in this scene. Not only does it seem to have vanished, but has been transformed by humility. He displays this by placing Bilbo’s values above his own. Wealth, expertise, and entitlement have been given a new standing in the order of importance—one that is far below that of friendship and the merriment that home comforts bring.

The two destinations that Bilbo and Thorin arrive at may be linked to the patient fostering of Gandalf. If it had not been for Gandalf, Bilbo would have not seen the letter and contract on his mantelpiece and therefore would not have even gone on the adventure in the first place. Likewise, if it was not for Gandalf’s continuing challenge of Thorin’s arrogance throughout the story, Thorin might not have arrived at a place of honorable humility in his final hours. Gandalf brings dramatic change to the lives of those he encounters. It is not an immediate change or something that Gandalf takes entirely into his own hands. Rather, it is patient action alongside a surrender to the will of the Good that promotes holiness in its benefactors. Gandalf chooses Bilbo for the quest on a hunch and finds Thorin through tremendous luck. These chain of events hold a deal more than coincidental implications. In considering the Assimilation version of *The Hobbit*, we may concur that Gandalf perceives this luck as the hand of Ilúvatar influencing events to being brought up into the theme of the Great Music. Gandalf, being an Ainu, acts in accordance with the harmonization of Creation by directly participating in the theme of Ilúvatar, and in doing so, assists Thorin and Bilbo in their growth in holiness.

B

Understanding Gandalf’s call as an ongoing participant in the unification of the Great Theme of Ilúvatar, we may better grasp, not only Gandalf’s function but, the important role that music plays within Middle-earth and in *The Hobbit*. Music serves as a means for which adventure, newness, and love—among other things—causes transformation. It is also a signifier of the change at hand. This first becomes evident after the unexpected dinner, “when Thorin struck [his golden harp] the music began all at once, so sudden and sweet that Bilbo forgot everything else, and was swept away into dark lands under strange moons, far over The Water and very far from his hobbit-hole under The Hill.”²¹ When reading this passage, one may be reminded of The Ainulindalë, where music is the means for creation. Perhaps Bilbo is awakened to things beyond his small world of “The Water” and “The Hill” because music is one of the primary means in which Eru Ilúvatar acts. Similar to the way in which Ilúvatar creates through music, so are the creatures moved to act sub-creatively when music falls upon their ears, i.e., when they are exposed to other forms of sub-creation.

When many of Middle-earth’s inhabitants hear music or poetry they are able to say, as Julian Tim Morton Eilman has rightly pointed out, “I do not feel as if being inside a song. I am the song myself.”²² I believe that Eilman’s articulation of this sort of phenomenon that Tolkien’s characters

experience speaks to what Bilbo feels when he hears the dwarves' song. Bilbo is a creature who hears music that is sub-created by other creatures, and inspires Bilbo to respond in a holy fashion. Eilman continues: "certain forms of poetry are able to evoke vivid images and ideas into the recipient's mind, causing an effect that is repeatedly called 'enchantment.'"²³ Understanding the tension of created beings' ability to sub-create and the effect that sub-creation has on others (particularly music) is essential to grasping Tolkien's legendarium as a whole and his views on writing fantasy. This is where one may observe Tolkien's personal theology and perspective spill over into *The Hobbit*.

We must consider Tolkien's *On Fairy-Stories* if we are to successfully parse out what it means to be a sub-creator and what it is to receive sub-creation. Outside of fantasy, Tolkien says of the sub-creator, "He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is 'true:' it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside."²⁴ These elements are a product of, what John Carswell has called, Tolkien's Creative Mysticism. For Tolkien, sub-creation goes beyond quenching the thirst of our desire to behold the works of our hands. The artist's work holds eternal implications that transcend our finite vision. Carswell puts it this way, "mankind draws imaginative influence from the original work of the Creator, and through his imagination begins to see in the things of creation the world as the Creator intended it to be seen."²⁵ The music of Thorin and Company carry the same implications and stimulate Bilbo's senses to the wide world around him. Unlike the human recipient, Bilbo actually resides in Tolkien's Secondary World and is therefore a part of it. On the other hand, similar to the human recipient, Bilbo has spent most of his time living in naiveté and the sub-creativity of the dwarves begins to expand his perception of, not only the surrounding world, but of himself.

In light of Tolkien's views on the creature's drawn inspiration from the Creator, one may observe that music functions as—to assign it a theological term—a Means of Grace.²⁶ In Christian theology a Means of Grace is something through which God gives their Divine Grace, i.e., virtue, righteousness, holiness etc. Perhaps music viewed in this way may assist one in seeing the holy effect that it has on its beneficiary within the legendarium. The concept here is that Ilúvatar speaks through the music to nudge Bilbo further into the holy destiny that Ilúvatar has set forth. Bilbo's response will determine the ways in which he will participate in or refuse Ilúvatar's plan, and we shall see that the interplay between Eru's actions and Bilbo's reactions will affect the outcome of the story, the fate of Middle-earth, and Bilbo himself.

C

This sets us up nicely to delve into the third and final means by which holiness is delivered: luck. Tolkien bestows weight to the word luck, in a way that gives it a heartbeat all of its own. It moves in a way that progresses the protagonists, transforms them, and stunts their enemies. Where certain characters alongside their sub-creations of music or poetry

are the means by which Ilúvatar acts, luck is his direct intervention. It is the fuel to the holy fire. It is here that I would like to attach a note of clarification. From reading Tolkien's works in regards to the legendarium, readers will see that Ilúvatar is Good and all that he does is good, but not all that comes from him is forced to be good. We shall discover that all things will eventually be drawn into the theme of Ilúvatar, making all things good. However, this result is not one of an ultimate force that constrains all things to be harmonized. Luck would lose its "luckiness" if it meant coercion. Rather, luck maneuvers in and through all things and circumstances that are good or bad, waiting for a response that "shall prove but mine [Ilúvatar's] instrument in the devising of things more wonderful."²⁷

The theme of luck can be seen at the Unexpected Party when Thorin tells the story of Smaug's assault upon The Lonely Mountain: "Some of the dwarves who happened to be outside (I was one luckily—a fine adventurous lad in those days, always wandering about, and it saved my life that day)—well, from a good way off we saw the dragon settle on our mountain in a spout of flame."²⁸ Only from a proper understanding of luck in light of the entire story is the reader able to see that Thorin's choice of the word "luckily" is not a coincidental one. Who knows if in that moment Thorin fully comprehended the implications that his sentence carried? One may read that Thorin used luck to refer to the sparing of his life as a result of his wandering, but we know that Thorin's life is one life out of possibly thousands that suffered the brutality of Smaug. How can a tragedy at this capacity be good? The short answer is that there is no possible way for Smaug's onslaught of the citizens of Erebor and Dale to be good. However, we may be able to see this unfortunate event as an opportunity for good to blossom. Consider that two out of the three dwarven monarchs were lost to death and or lunacy, and that large quantity of dwarves and humans were killed directly by Smaug. The odds are not looking favorable towards our King Under the Mountain. Strangely though, the lucky fate of Thorin in an unlucky situation initiates a journey that follows closely to the narrative of his escape. We later find that if Smaug had not taken The Lonely Mountain and sent the dwarves in diaspora there might not have been a Battle of Five Armies that united the race of men, elves, and dwarves against their common foes and Bilbo certainly would not have found the One Ring at the roots of the Misty Mountains.

Luck has an interesting way of transforming the situation quite literally, but also through the alteration of a character's perspective. To fully grasp luck in this way we must survey Tolkien's concept of eucatastrophe. To his son, Christopher he writes that eucatastrophe is "the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with joy that brings tears...joy that produces tears because it is qualitatively so like sorrow, because it comes from those places where Joy and Sorrow are at one, reconciled, as selfishness and altruism are lost in Love."²⁹ This is a concept that Tolkien develops further in *The Lord of the Rings*, but he attributes eucatastrophe to *The Hobbit* in the same letter. It seems that eucatastrophe is

closely related to the providence of Ilúvatar. Here is where we may observe the parallels held between the idea of holy and eucatastrophe.

It is in the Old Testament where readers first encounter the word holy in reference to the god of Israel, YHWH (יהוה). Holiness is what marks YHWH as unique from the other gods of Mesopotamia. YHWH is inherently holy, and followers of YHWH are frequently being called to be holy as their god is holy, particularly throughout the first five books of the Old Testament, which are commonly referred to as the Pentateuch. Where the Israelites saw and experienced oppression from other nations and their gods, it was YHWH's holy acts that delivered Israel from their trials. YHWH acting in this way is expressed in the ancient Hebrew word, *chesed* (חֶסֶד), which is “translated ‘steadfast love.’ *Chesed* is covenant love. On God's part it pledges Him to perform all the promises to His people.”³⁰ YHWH does not prevent Israel from experiencing devastation, but he does promise to deliver them from it. A fitting example is that of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt to the Wilderness, which leads Israel to establishing itself as a nation. It would be difficult now to look at the difficulties of Israel and their wanderings in the Wilderness as cut off from the rest of the narrative. But it is in light of the whole of the Old and New Testaments that Tolkien would have seen these stories culminated in what he called the “greatest ‘eucatastrophe’”—the Resurrection of Christ. It is the whole history of Israel, with misfortunes and all that Tolkien would have seen as integrally wrapped up in the story of the Roman Catholic Church. It is from this understanding of the holiness of God making an appearance throughout Christian history that bleeds into the eucatastrophe or luck of *The Hobbit*. Ilúvatar does not make a covenant with a certain people-group per se, but he has given his word. It is not very often that Ilúvatar talks, but when he does, we may be sure to pay attention because what he says carries overarching implications for the entirety of the legendarium.

The luck encountered by Thorin and Bilbo is not a coercive luck, but it is inescapable, similarly to the function of the holiness of YHWH expressed through *chesed*. Luck functions as eucatastrophe throughout *The Hobbit*—from Gandalf's finding of Thrain's map to the coming of the Eagles at the Battle of Five Armies. There really does not seem to be an event that hasn't been touched by luck, and when there are active participants in the luck handed to them, like Gandalf, others become subject to it. Bilbo and Thorin respond positively to the fortune that has befallen them, making them active members of a cosmic orchestra that help move the Great Theme closer to its crescendo.

Conclusion

The Hobbit can be summarized as a story of small individuals accomplishing big things in a big world. Even players such as Gandalf and Beorn are just small pieces that make up a much bigger picture. The best of heroes within Middle-earth live in accordance with this reality. We see that arrogance and pride are accompanied by self-obsession,

which results in isolation and death as consequences. This sort of behavior is portrayed in people like the Master of Lake-town, who keeps the gold given by Bard after the Battle of Five Armies to himself, and then dies of starvation in the wastes. Smaug is the ultimate embodiment of selfishness in *The Hobbit*. He dreadfully murders the dwarves and men of the Lonely Mountain in order to take the entirety of their wealth. This is not even done for an end beyond Smaug's self. Thorin explains the worm's disposition, “Dragons steal gold and jewels, you know, from men and elves and dwarves, wherever they can find them; and they guard their plunder as long as they live (which is practically forever, unless they are killed), and never enjoy a brass ring of it. Indeed they hardly know a good bit of work from a bad, though they usually have a good notion of the current market value.”³¹ There is no doubt that Smaug had committed evil before, but the overhaul of Erebor's treasure serves as further proof of his corruption.

We may draw a parallel to this sort of selfish behavior with Gollum's extended stay in the Misty Mountains with his precious Ring. The reader learns later in *The Lord of the Rings* that Gollum was born Smeagol, but becomes twisted after he murders his cousin in order to obtain the One Ring. Smeagol is then driven out after his heinous act and detaches himself from the rest of the world to keep in constant contact with his precious, and eventually becomes Gollum. Both Smaug and Smeagol are willing to go through extreme measures to take what they desire, and end up accomplishing things of terrible measure. It would seem that these “accomplishments” would be the initiation into their own destruction. For just as holiness is a dynamic reality that transforms those who bear it moment by moment, so does evil continually incline its owner to be more diabolical than before. But for every growing pain that brings the wicked to increase in wickedness, the harder their end. The trend for villains in Middle-earth seems to lead them to their malevolent magnum opus, which is followed by long periods of inactivity, and then culminates in an overzealous final attempt to secure what they lust for. In their last attempt to seize control is where Smaug meets the Black Arrow and Gollum takes a dive into the magma of Mount Doom.

Defeat is not what these creatures expected. In fact, the odds seem to be highly in their favor. Bard takes a lucky shot with information that he receives from the Thrush, who received their information from Bilbo, who attained it from Smaug. Gollum knocked out Sam with a rock and overcame Frodo to eventually win back the Ring. Not to mention that Sauron knew where the Ring was because of Frodo slipping it on his finger, and could easily have retrieved it if Gollum had escaped from Orodruin. But it is because Gollum loses his balance that he fell into the molten lava with the Ring. Luck seems to be at work in both of these instances.

It is from observing the fate of the big and bad and the humble and holy that we may be able to see the evidence of eucatastrophe at work. Smaug sees himself as magnificent and invincible, which leads to his proper end. Bilbo, on the other hand, views himself as a simple hobbit from Bag End,

but continually acts in a way that compromises his well-being for the sake of others. It is because of this that Bilbo is brought to a stature beyond the scope of his and the dwarves' original perception, and why he is able to nobly accomplish what he does. Eucatastrophe is an inescapable reality in Middle-earth. Its inhabitants can either align themselves in accordance with it or attempt to play by their own tune, only to be incorporated in the orchestra of the Great Theme.

To see holiness as an extension of Ilúvatar through the theme of eucatastrophe one may catch a glimpse of holy influences throughout the story. This in turn may bring the reader to a deeper grasp of what is going on in *The Hobbit* and those who reside in its pages. Bilbo and the dwarves are not just simple "good guys" out to win a treasure through the conquering of a "bad guy" because they are, in fact, the "good guys." The events preceding the Unexpected Party to the proceedings after the victory of the Battle of Five Armies have eternal consequences for Middle-earth, and everything that happens in between causes a complex ripple effect that spills over into every moment in the history of Arda. To understand this reality in Tolkien's works is to recognize that all have a part to play in the fate of the World and that each part, although small, carries significant implications for the whole.

In the end, Bilbo comes to the realization of his significance by recognizing how insignificant he really is in the grand scheme of things. Holiness culminates through patient and humble response to the lucky nudge to play one's part in a surrender to the will of the Good. Bilbo articulates this understanding with his final exchange with Gandalf: "Then the prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!" said Bilbo. "Of course!" said Gandalf. "And why should not they prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!" "Thank goodness!" said Bilbo laughing, and handed him the tobacco-jar.³² After we turn the final leaf of *The Hobbit* time and time again, perhaps we may find ourselves becoming more hobbit-like with each visit.

Notes

- 1 Polk, Nicholas J.S. "The Holy Fellowship: Holiness in The Lord of the Rings." *Mallorn*, no. 57. 2016. 29-31.
- 2 Olsen, Corey. *Exploring J.R.R. Tolkien's The Hobbit*. First ed. Mariner Books. 2013. 12-13.
- 3 Polk. 30.
- 4 Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Hobbit*. Revised ed. Ballantine Books. 1977. 15-16.
- 5 Olsen. 22.
- 6 Tolkien. *The Hobbit*. 205.
- 7 Ibid. 269-270.
- 8 Ibid. 205.
- 9 Tolkien, J.R.R. "Letter 131" *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter. Houghton Mifflin. 2000. 158. See Tolkien's footnote on the origins of Hobbits and their nature.

- 10 Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Silmarillion*. First ed. Ballantine Books. 1984. 150.
- 11 Ibid. 41.
- 12 Tolkien. *The Hobbit*. 17-19.
- 13 Tolkien. *The Silmarillion*. 24-25.
- 14 Tolkien, J.R.R. *Unfinished Tales*. First ed. Ballantine Books. 1988. 406.
- 15 Ibid. 408.
- 16 Ibid. 414.
- 17 Tolkien. *The Hobbit*. 31-32.
- 18 Ibid. 29.
- 19 Ibid. 258.
- 20 Ibid. 272-273.
- 21 Ibid. 26.
- 22 Eilman, Julian Tim Morton. "I Am the Song" *Light Beyond All Shadow: Religious Experience in Tolkien's Work*. Edited by Paul E. Kerry and Sandra Miesel. Lanham, MD: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011. 100.
- 23 Ibid. 103.
- 24 Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-Stories" *Tree and Leaf*. London: HarperCollins, 2001. 37.
- 25 Carswell, John. "All Tales May Come True: Tolkien's Creative Mysticism." *Mallorn*, no. 58. 2017. 10-11.
- 26 Marchese, Shawn E., and Alan Sisto. "Episode 059 - Run Away!" The Prancing Pony Podcast. November 12, 2017. Accessed December 20, 2017. <https://theprancingponypodcast.com/category/podcast-episodes/>. I want to thank Alan Sisto and Shawn Marchese for helping me arrive at this insight.
- 27 Tolkien. *The Silmarillion*. 6.
- 28 Tolkien. *The Hobbit*. 35.
- 29 Tolkien. "Letter 89" *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. 100.
- 30 Greathouse, William M. *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1998. 24.
- 31 Tolkien. *The Hobbit*. 35.
- 32 Ibid. 286-287.

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Nicholas J. S. Polk works as a Social Worker and is a licensed minister in the Church of the Nazarene. He and his beautiful wife Kelly live in Nashville.