



## PROFILES IN FAITH

### J.R.R. Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*

by Dr. Art Lindsley  
Senior Fellow



**J**R.R. Tolkien's great work *The Lord of the Rings* has, in the opinion of many, a rightful claim to the ranking: "Book of the Century." In 1996, Waterstone's bookstores in England took a readers' poll asking for the "five books you consider to be the greatest of the century." Of the 26,000 respondents, 5,000 cast first place votes for *The Lord of the Rings*. This first-place voting pattern held true for every store branch in England except Wales, where James Joyce's *Ulysses* took first place. When a great negative reaction arose from professional critics and journalists, *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper conducted its own poll but received the same result. Another group — the Folio Society — asked its membership which books they wanted to see included in the society's special edition. Again, *The Lord of the Rings* got 10,000 votes and first place. In 1997, on a British television program, "Bookworm," 50,000 respondents once again placed Tolkien's series first. Finally, in 1999 another poll got a different result: the Bible was first and *The Lord of the Rings* second.

...The Lord of the Rings has, in the opinion of many, a rightful claim to the ranking: "Book of the Century."

It would be interesting to take a similar poll in the United States, especially after the first two *Lord of the Rings* films. There is no doubt that this trilogy has been tremendously popular: *The Hobbit* has stayed in print for sixty years, selling more than 40 million copies. *The Lord of the Rings* has similarly continued to be available for fifty years, selling over 50 million copies — of all three volumes! We will leave future generations to decide whether *The Lord of the Rings* is THE book of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but given the high regard in which it is held by so many, we are compelled to give it strong consideration.

*Response*  
When *The Lord of the Rings* was first published in August 1954, Tolkien dreaded the reviews. He wrote in a letter: "I am dreading publication, for it will be impossible not to mind what is said. I have exposed my heart to be shot at." Not surprisingly, the response ranged from high praise to outright contempt. In the latter category, American writer and critic Edmund Wilson (1895-1972) called the book "juvenile trash." Similarly, Scottish-born

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disciples who can  
articulate, defend, and  
live  
faith in Christ  
through personal and  
public life.



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*Watch and Pray*

by Thomas A. Tarrants, III, *President*

Dear Reader,

As this issue of *Knowing & Doing* goes to press, there is a palpable air of uncertainty swirling in and around the Washington area. Will there be a war with Iraq? What will happen if there is? Can the economy hope to improve in the face of international troubles?

And, these questions fall against the background of sadness and shock at the fiery breakup of Space Shuttle Columbia. The media's photographs of the wreckage recovery and grief-stricken families and co-workers are painful to see.

But, there has also been a message of hope. C.S. Lewis Institute co-founder and Senior Fellow Jim Houston spoke at a conference entitled, "Redeeming Our Tears: Experiencing Transformation through Suffering, Sorrow, and Disappointment." In his wise and experienced way, Jim was able to take the perennial problem of pain and help us see God's hand working to bring remarkable changes in our lives – if we allow him to have his way.

Troubling times are never welcome, but they *are* instructive, most of all about matters of eternity. During these times the "spectacles" of prayer help us see more clearly the ways in which God wants to reorder our priorities, and even help others find peace in Christ.

Two recommendations:

1. Pray. You will be amazed at the difference it makes.
2. Order the tapes or CDs of the Jim Houston conference. Take advantage of the opportunity to hear from someone who can help you see what God may be doing in times of trouble.

Your brother in Christ,

*Tom*

## C.S. Lewis on Chronological Snobbery

by Art Lindsley, Ph.D.

Senior Fellow, C.S. Lewis Institute

One of the often-heard objections to faith in Christ is that it is old fashioned or outmoded, a relic of the distant past and therefore easily discarded. After all, what could a two-thousand-year-old faith have to say to us in the twenty-first century?

This was one of the obstacles that C.S. Lewis had to overcome in order to come to faith in Christ. He dubs the problem as one of “chronological snobbery.” His friend Owen Barfield often argued with him on this issue. Lewis’s question was: How could this ancient religion be relevant to my present setting? Lewis defines this chronological snobbery as “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate of our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.” Lewis eventually came to understand the need to ask further questions such as: Why did this idea go out of date? Was it ever refuted? If so, by whom, where, and how conclusively? In other words, you need to determine if an old idea is false before you reject it; we would not want to say that everything believed in an ancient culture was false. Which things are false – and why – and which things remain true?

Lewis came to the further conclusion that our own age was merely a period which, like past periods, has its own characteristic illusions. We can unthinkingly take for granted certain cultural assumptions, unless they are questioned. The classic illustration is the frog in the kettle. If you put a frog in a kettle of water and slowly turn up the heat, the frog adjusts to the rising temperature and therefore does not jump out – until it is too late. In a similar way, we can be affected by our cultural environment, yet be unaware of the significant impact

being made on us. In Colossians 2:8 we are warned to “Beware of philosophy ....” Some believers have used this as a pretext for avoiding the subject altogether, but the only way to *beware* of philosophy is to *be aware* of it. Otherwise, you might fall captive to an alien philosophy and not know it.

So, far from rejecting ancient philosophies, we need the help of past ages in order to see our own times more clearly. Earlier cultures have not had the same assumptions as we have, and as we read books written in earlier times, we are given a helpful vantage point from which to see our present-day views more clearly. Rather than having “chronological snobbery,” Lewis advocated letting the “breezes of the centuries” blow through our minds. We can do this by reading old books. In fact, Lewis made it a rule of thumb that one should read at least as many old books as new ones. Lewis wrote:

It’s a good rule after reading a new book never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to three new ones.... Every age has its own outlook. It is especially good at seeing certain truths and especially liable to make certain mistakes. We all therefore need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period.... None of us can fully escape this blindness, but we shall certainly increase it, and weaken our guard against it, if we read only modern books.... The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds and this can only be done by reading old books.

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Dr. Art Lindsley

## C.S. Lewis on Chronological Snobbery

(continued from page 3)

...progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be and if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road...the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.

Perhaps we need to go back in order to go forward. G.K. Chesterton said, "Real development is not leaving things behind, as on a road, but drawing life from them, as from a root." Today we seem to face a double danger: the danger of forgetting the decisive truth of Christ and the revelation of Scripture and the danger of being caught up in this postmodern, relativistic moment and losing a secure hold on our faith.

Obviously, as human beings trying to communicate with other human beings, we desire to relate to our contemporaries in a manner that is intelligible to them. However, we do not need to take our bearings from their modern or postmodern views. We need the perspective of the past on our present.

The objection will no doubt come: "Surely you are not asking us in the twenty-first century to 'turn back the clock'!?" C.S. Lewis responds to this in *Mere Christianity*. He argues that the clock needs to be turned back if it's telling the wrong time, or if we have taken the wrong road, we need to go back and take the right one as soon as possible, or if we have started to do a math problem the wrong way, we need to correct it before going further. Lewis writes:

... as to putting the clock back, would you think I was joking if I said that you can put a clock back, and that if the clock is wrong it is often a very sensible thing to do?

But I would rather get away from that whole idea of clocks. We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place you want to be and if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man. We have all seen this when we do arithmetic. When I have started a sum the wrong way, the sooner I admit this and go back and start over again, the faster I shall get on. There is nothing progressive about being pig-headed and refusing to admit a mistake. And I think if you look at the present state of the world, it is pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistakes. We are on the wrong road. And if that is so, we must go back. Going back is the quickest way on.

You certainly don't "turn the clock back" or go back to the past for its own sake. Much in earlier ages and of past history can show us how *not* to do things as well as in some cases how to do them. In the former case, the classic proverb applies: If we don't learn from history's mistakes, we are bound to repeat them. However, in the latter case, there are some wise words and teaching that need to be preserved and

passed on. Some have pointed out that Jesus was not a "revolutionary" wanting to overthrow everything in the established religious order of his day. Jesus was also not a mere "conservative" holding to all the traditional practices of his day, although there was much that he did want to conserve—particularly the truth of Scripture. Our Lord reacted particularly against places where traditions had overturned or obscured the Scriptures. In a similar manner, we need to sift through what is good from our heritage and pass on a valuable inheritance to others. We need to keep the flame of faith burning brightly, letting our light shine, and passing the torch on to succeeding generations.

### *Enslaved to the Recent Past*

In fact, much that passes for the newest, novel philosophies of our time is actually a legacy of the past—primarily not the distant past but the recent past. C.S. Lewis points out in his "Transmission of Christianity" essay that

...the sources of unbelief among young people today do not lie in those young people. The outlook they have—until they are taught better—is a backwash from an earlier period. It is nothing intrinsic to themselves that holds them back from the Faith.

In Lewis's time, the teachers were products of the "post-war" (World War I) period.

The beliefs of his period became those that were passed on in the sixties. The beliefs of the sixties tend to be the views passed on today, and so on. Lewis says:

This very obvious fact—that each generation is taught by an earlier generation—must be kept firmly in mind. The beliefs which boys fresh from school now hold are the beliefs of the Twenties. The beliefs which boys from school will hold in the Sixties will be largely those of the undergraduates today. The moment we forget this we begin to talk nonsense about education.

Even more, the attitude and disposition of the teacher tends to be passed on to the student. Since the mood of postmodernism is so cynical, it tends to produce cynical students. Lewis maintains:

None can give to another what he does not possess himself. No generation can bequeath to its successor what it has not got. ... if we are skeptical we shall teach only skepticism to our pupils, if fools only folly, if vulgar only vulgarity, if saints sanctity, if heroes heroism.

So that which we receive in contemporary education is not so contemporary as it seems. It tends to be affected by the previous generation. Today's novelties tend to be a legacy of the recent past. It's not a question of *whether* the past will affect

us but *which* past—the recent past or more distant past. If we really want to be skeptical about the past, be skeptical about the present. “Chronological snobbery” thoroughly applied would lead to questioning all of our present fashions. Those who neglect past history tend to be enslaved to the recent past.

#### *The Dinosaur*

We cannot be afraid of being called old fashioned, outdated, or dinosaurs. C.S. Lewis gave a classic talk as his Cambridge inaugural address titled “De Descriptione Temporum.” Toward the end of that address, Lewis claims to be a part of the Old Western order more than the present post-Christian one. This might be both a disqualification and a qualification. It would be a disqualification because who would want to sit through a lecture on dinosaurs by a dinosaur? Lewis says, “You don’t want to be lectured on a Neanderthal Man by a Neanderthaler, still less on dinosaurs by a dinosaur.” Yet Lewis’s claim might also, from another point of view, be a qualification. Although a dinosaur lecture might not prove to be very illuminating, it might tell us some things we would like to know, especially having never seen a live dinosaur. Lewis explains the “qualification”:

And yet is that the whole story? If a live dinosaur dragged its slow length into the laboratory, would we not all look back as we fled?

What a chance to know at last how it really moved and looked and smelled and what noises it made! And if the Neanderthaler could talk, then, though his lecturing technique might leave much to be desired, should we not almost certainly learn from him some things about him that the best modern anthropologist could never have told us? He would tell us without knowing he was telling.

Lewis claimed that he read ancient texts as a native would rather than as a foreigner might read them. That made him admittedly a dinosaur. Although you might be tempted to disregard him as old fashioned, he might nevertheless be useful as a specimen. Lewis says:

...where I fail as a critic, I may yet be useful as a specimen. I would dare to go further. Speaking not only for myself but for all other old Western men whom you may meet, I would say, use your specimen while you can. There are not going to be many more dinosaurs.

Although we may be disregarded as a specimen of an earlier age, a dinosaur, it is not necessarily safer or better to march in step with the latest or newest trends in philosophy or culture.

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*If a live dinosaur dragged its slow length into the laboratory, would we not all look back as we fled? What a chance to know at last how it really moved and looked and smelled and what noises it made!*



Richard Foster

## Becoming Like Christ

by RICHARD J. FOSTER

*What is supposed  
to happen in the  
Christian life.*

For the Christian, heaven is not a goal; it is a destination. The goal is that “Christ be *formed* in you,” to use the words of the apostle Paul (Gal. 4:19; all passages quoted are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.) To the Romans, he declares, “Those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed* to the image of his son” (8:29). And to the Corinthians, he says, “All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being *transformed* into the same image” (2 Cor. 3:18; emphasis added in all three). Thus the daring goal of the Christian life could be summarized as our being formed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. And the wonder in all this is that Jesus Christ has come among his people as our everliving Savior, Teacher, Lord, and Friend.

He who is the Way shows us the way to live so that we increasingly come to share his love, hope, feelings, and habits. He agrees to be yoked to us, as we are yoked to him, and to train us in how to live our lives as he would live them if he were in our place.

Now, we must insist that this way of life is reliably sustained in the context of a like-minded fellowship. Essential to our growth in grace is a community life where there is loving, nurturing accountability. Christlikeness is not merely the work of the individual; rather, it grows out of the matrix of a loving fellowship. We are the body of Christ together,

called to watch over one another in love. Unfortunately, in our day there is an abysmal ignorance of how we as individuals and as a community of faith actually move forward into Christlikeness.

We today lack a theology of growth. And so we need to learn how we “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). In particular, we need to learn how we cooperate with “the means of grace” that God has ordained for the transformation of the human personality. Our participation in these God-ordained “means” will enable us increasingly to take into ourselves Christ’s character and manner of life.

What are these “means of grace”? And how can disciples of Jesus Christ cooperate with them so they are changed into Christlikeness?

### *Formed by Experiential Means*

God works first through the ordinary experiences of daily life to form the character of Christ in us. Through these experiences we come to know on the deepest levels that Jesus is with us always, that he never leaves us nor forsakes us, and that we can cast all our care upon him. In addition, we learn that ordinary life is sacramental, and that divine guidance is given primarily in these common junctures of life.

*Work as sacrament.* The most foundational of these character-formation experiences is found in our work. Work places us into the stream of divine action. We are “subcreators,” as J.R.R. Tolkien reminds us. In saying this, I am not referring to sharing our faith at work or praying throughout our work. Both of these are good, to be sure; but I am referring to the sacredness of the work itself. As you and I care for our daily tasks, we are glorifying God in the work itself. When Martin Luther gave us his revolutionary teaching about the priesthood of all believers, he was referring not just to the fact that the plowboy and the milkmaid could do priestly or liturgical work, but that the plowing and

the milking themselves were priestly work.

If we are working to “the audience of One,” we will find Jesus to be our constant companion and friend – though our work be so mundane as picking up sticks. We will grow in intimacy with God and patience with others. And we will experience divine care and supernatural guidance in the most ordinary circumstances – like discovering the problem with the washing machine or finding the right words for a difficult conversation.

Jesus, we must remember, spent most of his earthly life in what we today call a blue-collar job. He did not wait until his baptism in the Jordan to discover God. Far from it! Jesus validated the reality of God in the carpentry shop over and over before speaking of the reality of God in his ministry as a rabbi. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,” says Paul, “do everything for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

*Trials that produce endurance.* Another experiential means of grace for the formation of the human personality is found in the various trials, tribulations, and difficulties through which we go. The apostle James reminds us, “Whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (James 1:2-3). This “endurance” is what the old moral philosophers called “fortitude,” and they viewed it as one of the foundational virtues that was essential for a good life. James adds, “And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:4).

At times, these adversities are tragic in the extreme. The company you worked for your entire life goes belly-up and you are left without a job. Your only daughter dies suddenly and needlessly in a car accident. A tiny error at the hospital renders you permanently blind. These are the sorrows that are written across the face of humanity.

But most often, the trials we face are of the garden variety rather than heroic. Your superior at the office makes a mistake that places you in an awkward position. Your son puts a

nice round hole in the neighbor’s window with his new BB gun. You are embroiled in ongoing tension with someone who used to be your best friend.

But through the operations of grace, even these work endurance in us, and we learn something of the cosmic patience of God. We come to see God’s timing and God’s ways as altogether good. We become what George Fox called “established” men and women.

Trials, tribulations, persecutions – these we should expect. They are part of life. Even more important, they are part of our discipleship to Christ – “Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). The key is how we are shaped and formed ever more fully into the way of Christ through the process of these experiences.

*Movings of the Spirit.* Still another form of the experiential means of God’s grace comes through our interaction with the movings of the Holy Spirit upon our hearts. Have you ever felt the drawing and encouraging of the Spirit? You probably did not hear an audible voice – though we must never rule out that possibility. But more likely you sensed the weight and authority that comes with divine communication. The clarity of the Word of Truth was unmistakable. And it coincided with God’s revealed truth in Scripture, for the same Spirit who inspired Scripture is at work within you.

Often the Spirit comes to us as Teacher. Perhaps we receive a simple word of assurance and care: “You are loved in ways you never dared hope.” Maybe there are blind spots that need his tender scrutiny. Perhaps there is instruction in truth. The key lies in our reaction to and interaction with God’s grace-filled teaching.

We may harden our hearts and turn away from the light. But God’s patience and love overcomes us, and we repent and turn into the light. We may argue, debate, question. Back and forth we go until we come to

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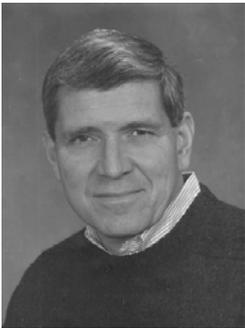
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## Leadership Lessons in Following *Learning from the Writings of Dallas Willard*

by Ray Blunt

Adjunct Faculty, Federal Executive Institute and the Leadership Development Academy



Ray Blunt

*It takes a leader to grow a leader  
—but, inevitably, a good leader  
must first be a follower.*

**I**n 1998, I was in the early years of a third career when I read Dallas Willard's *Divine Conspiracy*.

My new field of work aimed to use my leadership background and training to develop servant leaders in public service and in the church, but I seemed to be missing something. I knew a lot about *what* it takes to be a leader—mostly learned through my experiences of stumbling—and yet so little about *how* to help younger people actually become wise leaders.

The issue of shaping character has, to a lesser or greater extent, always been a vexing question. More than anything else, people follow what they see as the heart, that quality in leaders which makes them, as C.S. Lewis wrote, “men with chests.” Character in leaders, then, is *the* central issue.

I came to recognize one clear truth about character formation: It takes a leader to grow a leader—but, inevitably, a good leader must first be a follower.

As I wrestled with these ideas and how to use these insights to help others, I came across a piece on *The Divine Conspiracy* and its emphasis on discipleship. The disciple, Willard

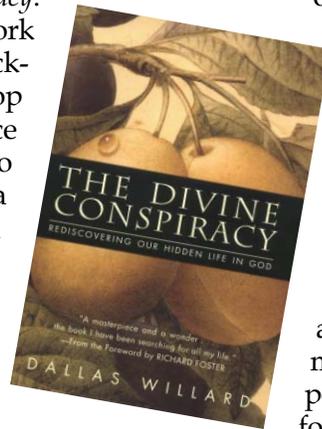
wrote, is one who follows and learns. The more I read, the more I began to connect the dots between discipleship and leadership.

This helpful insight spurred my interest in reading more of Willard's writings. I now have four of Willard's books, *Hearing God* and *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, the two that preceded *The Divine Conspiracy* as part of his trilogy, and the one that followed, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Each is excellent in its own way; however, I most often recommend *The Divine Conspiracy*, since

I have found it to be the most valuable in my life.

There are the two insights that continue to strike me as most relevant—and breathtaking. First is the understanding that the evangelical church's message has been diluted through its misperception of the Matthew 28 Great Commission as a call to “make converts.” I found myself saying “Yes!” when Willard pointed out that Jesus calls those who follow him to go and make disciples, not simply converts. For me, that was no small distinction. Followers are called to help grow other followers, those who follow, not the leader, but The Leader. This is not simply a changed point of view, but a call to believe and to act, a call for servant leaders to grow other servant leaders.

The second insight that continues to inform my life and work is that followers of Jesus are called not simply to follow his *teachings*, but to also look at *how he lived* his life on this earth. Again, that seems a small distinction in some ways, but it had huge implications for me. Two examples come to mind.



Jesus, perfect God/man that he was, walked in constant contact with the One he followed—his Father. He also took huge chunks of time to go alone to the mountains to pray. This shaping discipline of taking some significant time to pray was one that I never really thought was within my reach as busy as I was. But, I realized that my agenda was neither at the same intensity of engagement as Jesus', nor was my hourglass running as swiftly as was his. Jesus didn't just teach his followers what to pray—a subject I had tried to study diligently—they asked about prayer, because they saw what he did. Although still a work in progress, the notion of blocking significant time to pray alone in a solitary place and beginning to practice the presence of God have done more to make a difference for me than all of my studying over the years about prayer.

The second example is what, for me, I see as the heart of the message: Jesus' whole "strategy," the bull's-eye of the divine conspiracy, was to be a servant leader who grew a few servant leaders around him and then entrusted the succession of the responsibility of the mission to them—and to the power of the coming Holy Spirit within them.

As I thought about how I might have tackled his mission, I realized he understood more than anyone how a leader takes a vision, embeds it in the lives of others, and helps equip them to be the people to carry it on to ultimate fruition. He used stories to teach truths, not simply laying down a theological system or a series of "steps," and his own life was the real story—washing feet before he goes to the ultimate battle; laughing at the table with good friends, food, and drink; and, most significantly, the story we retell each Eucharist, his willingly dying for others.

I found this means of life-shaping echoed in Jim Houston's teaching on mentoring. He emphasizes the understanding of mentoring not being a "method" but a "way of life," deeply reinforcing the understanding of Jesus' life as his primary teaching.

Now, as I try to teach and mentor others, Jesus' example as a teacher, mentor, and coach of future leaders is one I return to again and again. Willard's books have been a significant

help in this regard.

On the surface, the leadership vision Willard describes is, it seems, so much smaller, less compelling, and even less immediate than the grand visions of the great corporations—and even many of the great churches. In the case of consumer-driven corporations and churches, the emphasis on meeting people's expressed and ever-changing needs and on producing large-sized results seems to be the alternative, competing story to Christ's vision for discipleship focusing on a few.

The patient, persistent cultivation of character and the investment of one's life in a few of those coming behind—"the long obedience in the same direction"—through time-tested and exemplified discipline has proven to be a far more powerful and enduring vision and strategy than that of the cover story leaders. Sadly, most of them fail to finish well; they are not "built to last." History shows this all too well. Enduring results come more from persistence on the few, "small" efforts of cultivating relationships and living obediently than from the larger, spectacular visions for transformation of culture and organizations commonly espoused today. "The divine conspiracy" was also the divine vision and strategy for transforming the world, and I believe Willard nails it.

The radical truth of Philippians 2:5-11 remains, for me, both the mindset and the example of the heart of wisdom I want to possess and to be my legacy at the end of the day. Those lessons will stand the test of time, and Dallas Willard has pulled them straight from the life of the Person I want to follow and learn from most. ■

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*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Philippians 2:5-11  
NIV

## Becoming Like Christ

(continued from page 7)

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I can  
never defeat  
pride by  
“trying.”  
Direct  
assault  
against  
pride will  
only make  
me proud  
of my  
humility!  
”

see the goodness of rightness. Throughout, God is molding, shaping, forming us into creatures that can bear the beams of his overcoming love; creatures that can contain God's goodness without being completely done in by it.

At other times, the Spirit comes as counselor and guide. Perhaps we are given prophetic words to share, and so with fear and trembling we speak out in the gathered meeting for worship. The experience is so exhilarating, however, that we forget ourselves and speak beyond our leading. Soon sensible of our error, we grieve over our disobedience, knowing that words once spoken cannot be retrieved. All the time we are learning to distinguish the life-giving words of the Spirit from the death-giving words of the flesh. We see that our humanly initiated words vanish into thin air, and that only the *d'bar Yhwh*, the word of the Lord, endures, and we come to treasure these wonderful words of life.

All these experiences, as varied and diverse as life itself, are meant to draw us deeper in and higher up into Christlikeness. And so they do when we are docile of heart. God takes the dynamic give and take of our interaction with himself and plants within us deep-rooted habits of the heart—habits of joyful allegiance and glad surrender, habits of faithful obedience and patient endurance.

### *Conformed by Formal Means*

The formal means of grace refers to well-recognized disciplines of the spiritual life: disciplines like prayer, study, fasting, solitude, simplicity, confession, celebration, and the like. I call these “formal” means because they involve formal ways of arranging our lives for training in the spiritual life. We simply must understand that we will never grow in Christlike habits and disposition without intense, well-informed action on our part.

Now it must be said with vigor that these acts do not make us acceptable to God. Our acceptance is by grace alone, and our justification is by grace alone. The disciplines make up the ground of this action. They are spiri-

tual exercises through which we bring our little individualized “power pack” — we call it the human body — and present it to God as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1).

*Athletes of God.* But these spiritual disciplines do train the body, mind, and spirit for the things of God. “Train yourself in godliness,” says Paul (1 Tim. 4:7). The background to Paul's call is the Greek gymnasium where athletes trained to participate in the games. And Christians from the earliest centuries spoke of themselves as the *athletae Dei*, the athletes of God.

We have embedded in our bodies and our minds habits of evil that permeate all human life. And our bodies and minds need proper discipline to be freed from these destructive habits so that they can be brought into a working harmony with our spirit.

Now, it is important to distinguish “training” from “trying.” I might try very hard to win a marathon race, but if I have not trained, I will not even finish, not to mention win. Without training, the resources simply are not in my muscles, they are not in the ingrained habit structures of my body. On the day of the race, no amount of trying will make up for the failure to train. It is the training that will enable me to participate effectively in the race. The same is true in the spiritual life. Training builds interior habits within us, “holy habits.”

*Conquering pride.* Suppose I am longing to win the battle over pride. (I know that today people are not much concerned about pride, but the devotional masters always saw it as among the most destructive sins.) I can never defeat pride by “trying.” Direct assault against pride will only make me proud of my humility! No, I must train. But what do I do?

Well, as I read the great writers on the soul — Saint Benedict's “Twelve Steps of Humility,” for example — I discover that they call me to deal with pride by training in *service*. Why? Because service takes us through the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves.

A father, for example, dies to his desire to watch Monday-night football in order to play with his children. Or a husband dies to a promotion that would mean relocating in order for his wife to advance in her chosen vocation.

These are *little* deaths, to be sure. But each one takes us beyond ourselves, and God uses these simple acts of service to work a miracle in us. Through serving others we learn how precious people are. We come to value them as persons, delighting even in their idiosyncrasies. All of this places us in a right relationship to others. “Me” and “mine” give way to “we” and “ours.” We come to see ourselves as part of a whole.

If, in addition, I read William Law’s *Serious Call* or Saint Bernard’s *Twelve Degrees of Humility and Pride*, I become aware of the importance of worship as a discipline for nurturing humility. As I begin to see God as high and lifted up, to overhear cherubim and seraphim praising God and all the heavenly host casting their crowns before the throne, singing, “You are worthy,” I am brought into appropriate perspective with relation to God (Rev. 4:9-11). I realize that all I am, all I have, all I do is derived. I am not the captain of my salvation nor the master of my fate. Far from it. I am utterly, completely, radically dependent upon a loving Father who brings me rain and sun as I need them, and in whom I live and move and have my being. You are, too.

Do you see what these basic spiritual exercises have done for us? They have nurtured us into proper perspective toward others — right horizontal relationships — and into proper perspective toward God — right vertical relationship. When these things come into place, we can understand what William Law meant when he spoke of “the reasonableness of humility.”

Now, these little exercises of service and worship do not make us righteous. Righteousness is first, foremost, and always a work of God “by grace through faith.” No, these exercises merely place us before God —

the simple offering of a living sacrifice. But from this small offering God is able to bring forth far greater good: such as creating in us an interior disposition of preferring others; such as understanding God as the creator and sustainer of all things; such as seeing our efforts as reflex responses to divine urgings; and much more.

This, in God’s time and in God’s way, produces a pleasing balance in our lives so that humility flows from us as naturally and as effortlessly as breathing.

*A menu of disciplines.* I have mentioned the disciplines of service and worship. There are many others. *Inward disciplines*, like meditation, prayer, fasting, and study, cultivate our heart and mind toward the way of Christ. Meditation is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word. Prayer is ongoing dialogue with the Father about what God and we are doing together. Fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function for the sake of intense spiritual activity. Study is the process through which we bring the mind to conform to the order of whatever we are concentrating upon.

*Outward disciplines*, like simplicity, solitude, and submission, cultivate our appetites toward the way of Christ. Simplicity is an inward reality of single-eyed focus on God that results in an outward lifestyle free from “cumber,” as William Penn put it. Solitude involves creating an open, empty space for God that undercuts all the false support systems we use to shore up our lives. Submission is the ability to lay down the everlasting burden of needing to get our own way.

*Corporate disciplines*, like confession, guidance, and celebration, cultivate our affections toward the way of Christ. Confession is the grace through which the sins and sorrows of the past are forgiven. Guidance is the experience of knowing the theocratic rule

(continued on page 12)

“ I am not  
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## Becoming Like Christ

(continued from page 11)

“  
When  
we read  
Scripture,  
we gain a  
world-view.  
We become  
immersed  
into “holy  
history.”

of God over our lives. Celebration is being, as Augustine said, “an alleluia from head to foot!”

Now, I have no exhaustive list of the spiritual disciplines, and as far as I know, none exists. We are simply finding ways to place who we are — body, mind, and spirit — before God. All of this, I must add, flows out of a proper disposition of the heart: seeking first the kingdom of God, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, longing to be like Christ.

Doing these things to be seen by others is a failure to understand that the disciplines have absolutely no merit in and of themselves. They do not make us right with God or improve our standing with God. All the disciplines of the spiritual life do is place us before God. At this point, they come to the end of their tether. But it is enough. God takes this simple offering, imperfect and misguided as it may be, and uses it to build within us virtues and graces we can hardly imagine — conforming us, always, to the way of Christ.

### *Transformed by Instrumental Means*

The instrumental means of grace refers to the various physical and human instruments God uses to transform us. God in his great wisdom has freely chosen to mediate his life to us through visible realities. This is a great mystery. God, who is pure Spirit, utterly free of all created limitations, stoops to our weakness and changes us by physical and visible means.

Many and varied are the instrumental means of grace. Baptism is a means of grace whereby we are buried into Christ’s death and raised unto his life. Preaching is a means of grace in which “the sacrament of the Word” is given to us, and the ministers of Christ are themselves the living elements in Christ’s hands, broken and poured out in soul. The laying on of hands is a means of grace through which God imparts to us what we desire or need, or what God, in his wisdom, knows is best for us. The anointing with oil is a means of grace for the healing of the sick. Intercessory prayer is a means of grace through which God freely uses human instrumentality to speak forth his will on earth as it is in heaven.

*Transformed by Scripture.* There is probably no more transforming instrumental means of grace than reading, studying, and meditating upon Scripture. Habitual reading of the Bible touches the affections; systematic study of the Bible touches the mind; and sustained meditation upon the Bible touches the soul.

When we read Scripture, we gain a world-view. We become immersed into “holy history.” In reading about God’s interaction with Abraham and Ruth, Mary and Paul, we understand something of God’s dealing with us. Reading whole sections in a single setting — Jeremiah, for example, or John or Romans — gives us the larger sense of the unseen world. With Abraham we begin seeking for a “city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). With Mary we confess, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). With Paul we can “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14; RSV).

Through this process the Bible becomes “all over autobiographic of you,” to use the phrase of Alexander Whyte. As we study Scripture, we are seeking the intent of the Author, searching for the meaning of the text. Grammar, history, geography, and critical research all play a vital part in our inquiry into the Word of God written. We submit to the results of our study, for we want what the Bible says more than what we want it to say.

When studying the Ten Commandments, for example, we discover through historical research that it parallels closely the form of the treaties of the ancient Near East in which the suzerain tells of his great grace and mercy to the vassal, and in gratitude, the vassal agrees to the stipulations of the covenant in obedience to the suzerain. Grace comes before obligation! All of a sudden, the words of God to the people of Israel take on an enlarged meaning: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2). Study, you see, brings the mind into conformity to the ways and nature of God.

In meditating upon Scripture, the heart

and the soul are molded ever more closely to the love of God. "How can young people keep their way pure?" cries the psalmist, and then he answers his own question: "By guarding it according to your word" (Ps. 119:9). Sustained rumination upon Scripture—in this case, Torah—will keep our way pure, particularly by purifying the aspirations of the soul.

We are also given new power. As we meditate, for instance, upon Jesus' staggering words, "My peace I give to you" (John 14:27), we are baptized into the reality of which the passage speaks. We brood on the truth that he is now filling us with his peace. The soul and spirit are awakened to his inflowing peace. We feel all motions of fear and anger stilled by "a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). And the grace-filled result: a heart enlarged to receive the love of God; "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long.... How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Ps. 119:97, 103).

*The Lord's Supper.* An obvious instrumental means of grace is the bread and the wine of Holy Communion. Regardless of our particular theological position on the Eucharist, we all agree that, in ways we cannot fully comprehend, the life of God is mediated to us through the bread and the wine. We bow under the wonder of this incarnational reality.

But how does our participation in the Eucharistic feast work to transform us into Christlikeness? Well, first of all, nearly every aspect of heart devotion is found at the Lord's Table—examination, repentance, petition, forgiveness, contemplation, thanksgiving, celebration, and more. And genuine heart devotion always produces character transformation. The Eucharist is the most important moral action of the church, because its celebration incorporates us into the ongoing story of God's redemptive work.

Then, too, the Lord's Supper brings forth inward transformation in the way in which it forces us to keep coming back to the Great Sacrifice: Jesus' broken body, his blood poured out. This is how we live. This is how we are strengthened. This is how we are empowered.

We all come to the Communion service praying the prayer of the child—the prayer of receiving. We come with open hands. We also come with empty hands. We have nothing to give. All we can do is receive. Each and every one of us approaches the Table declaring, "Just as I am, without one plea but that Thy blood was shed for me." What happens then is all of grace and nothing of us. Heart transformation. Faith. Hope. Love. An amazing simplicity that is free of manipulating and managing and maneuvering.

And "empty hands" brings us full circle, back to grace where we started. And what a transforming grace it is! It is a grace that not only gets us into heaven when we die but gets heaven into us here and now. It is a grace that is continuously forming and conforming and transforming us into the likeness of Christ. The only adequate response to such "amazing grace" is doxology. ■

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**Richard J. Foster** is the founder of RENOVARÉ and author of six books including *Celebration of Discipline, Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, and Streams of Living Water* which effectively promote personal spiritual renewal. From his base near Denver, Colorado, where he and Carolynn live, Richard travels throughout the world, speaking and teaching on the spiritual life.

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We all come  
to the  
Communion  
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praying the  
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We come  
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We have  
nothing to  
give.  
All we can  
do is receive.

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Jenise Jones Vaccaro

### Trading Fear for Love

by Jenise Jones Vaccaro  
*V.P. of Sales, Bowne Company*  
*2000 C.S. Lewis Fellows Class*

*An opportunity to grow in love  
and to overcome fear came in the  
form of a breakfast event.*

I am a witnessing wimp. I have never viewed “evangelism” as being one of my spiritual gifts. Does that excuse me from my calling to be salt and light in the workplace? Absolutely not. I have been challenged for years to carry out my calling as I wrongly tip the hat toward the fear of man. I *do* have a burden for the lost, but to be an overt witness without seeming contrived or unnatural...this is my particular struggle.

I have little problem with the things that are less overt: I don't curse or take the Lord's name in vain, I try to be honest and fair in all my dealings, and I readily own up to church involvement. When I am asked directly about my faith, I rejoice because I feel free to share from the heart when another person is giving me clear entry to do so. In my job, I network frequently among a community of hundreds of CEOs, CFOs, lawyers, financiers, and the like, and I've always tried to be authentic and interested in the real things of life versus engaging in empty talk so that, hopefully, people will open up and converse on subjects that might veer into spiritual matters.

My industry values and rewards the one who will stop at nothing to “get the deal,” so I am learning what it means to be different for the sake of the Gospel. How am I to behave in an environment where I am not only competing against our company's competitors, but also with my own colleagues? I have been directly challenged in this area time after time,

and it can get ugly. It is an interesting balance to strike between standing up for what is right and being a doormat. I have also been challenged to confess my failings publicly to colleagues when I feel my witness has been compromised by my actions. I have had fascinating responses to this, but after praying intensely beforehand that God would be glorified in my confessions, He has been faithful.

I often need to step back and be reminded of what is more weighty: getting a deal and being right, or yielding to a colleague because the relationship I may have with that person is of greater import than getting credit for a deal. One outcome of such an action is that I have had a manager tell me that I am not “tough enough.” How do I express my decision without sounding sanctimonious? Oh, to be eloquent and have a response that not only gives understanding for my position but also serves to glorify God to my management and colleagues. I must admit to some need for growth in this area as well. But, I recall the words of Proverbs 16:7, reminding us that “when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live in peace with him.” I am in most times at peace with my colleagues — no small feat when one considers the serious grudges being held by so many within the sales ranks of my industry. One of my prayers is that the light of God's love would be on my countenance and be evident in my actions. Were it not for this prayer, I am certain that my selfish, prideful side would win.

In November last year, I had a unique opportunity to be a more public witness. Another C.S. Lewis Fellow, Casey Veatch ('00 Class), and I are part of a host committee that put on the very first High Tech Prayer Breakfast in the Washington metro area. The breakfast was modeled on a wonderfully successful ministry in Atlanta that has hosted such breakfasts for the past eleven years. The concept is simple: each host committee member invites 5-10 colleagues, influencers, or clients to a breakfast at the Ritz Carlton - Tysons Corner. A delicious breakfast is followed by networking and a very straightforward testimony by a local high

tech “celebrity.” Next comes a talk by a nationally renowned business person.

As time approached for the breakfast, I joked with Casey that the event was doing an amazing thing: “smoking out” the Christians and pushing us far beyond our comfort zones. But, as the host committee issued its invitations, we were encouraged by the overall response to such an unusual networking event. People were intrigued and asked questions.

Was I quaking when I invited my colleagues and associates? Surprisingly, not as much as I thought. Have I had some measured, critical responses? Yes. However, I was prepared to have some individuals reject this forum – and even me. But, I continued to stay in relationship with the “non-responders,” remembering that they just weren’t ready...yet.

I have to say that I was glad for something like this to take me beyond my own fears. My hope was that this event would point each attendee to Christ in a meaningful way.

At that time, I was reminded of a quote from Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* where the lion, Aslan, says, “I am not safe, but I am good.” So it is with Christ as we follow His calling on our lives, particularly as lived out among those who reject Him. Our stand for Christ in the marketplace is definitely not “professionally safe.” He calls on His people to bear fruit, to be salt and light, to love unconditionally, to turn the other cheek...wow. Not a human recipe for success in the shark tank of business. But, we follow a good God who will, in the end, see us through potential rejection as we dispense with our fear of man and instead grow in the healthy fear of an infinitely good God.

As we focus on Jesus and turn away from our fears, He changes our hearts, helping us to feel what His heart feels: compassion for the lost, and a great desire to see that every lost soul finds the Good Shepherd. So I think of another lion in literature: the lion in *The Wizard of Oz*. He wanted courage. In the end, it was love in his heart that gave him what he needed. Love in our heart for Jesus and for others will be the thing that gives us the courage we lack.

When the breakfast took place, the results were nothing short of amazing. It was profoundly evident that many of the over 300 people who came were starving for meaning in life, and in conversations afterwards even the most resistant of souls were saying that they had much to consider about eternity.

Another outcome of the breakfast was my personal sense of release from the fear I’ve had regarding openness about my faith. In the two days following the event, I had several conversations with those present at the breakfast as well as with other colleagues and clients, all talking about the context of the breakfast’s message. People’s openness to discussing matters further has been a tremendous encouragement to me. And, while some have refused further conversation on the matter, I no longer feel worried about the negative impact on my relationship with them. It has given me a greater passion to pray that they will, in time, come into the Kingdom.

Thank God for His patience with me. May His gift of holy boldness seasoned with love bring an ongoing fruitful journey for all who are part of His Kingdom. ■

## C.S. Lewis Fellows

Each year, the C.S. Lewis Institute conducts the Fellows program, two small 10-12 person groups (one of men, one of women) who, while remaining in their careers, commit to a year of theological and spiritual formation through monthly teachings and individual mentoring. Aimed at the mid-career professional (typically 35-45 years old), the Fellows Program seeks to develop disciples who, like C.S. Lewis, can articulate, defend, and live faith in Christ through personal and public life.

**NEW!** In fall 2003, a new section of the Fellows Program will open for young professionals, ages 22-34. Patterned after the present curriculum and format, the new Fellows groups will address issues and topics pertinent to the season of life in the early career years.

Applications are accepted February 1-May 1. For more information on admission to either of the programs, write the Institute at: [fellows@cslewisinstitute.org](mailto:fellows@cslewisinstitute.org).

*...I was reminded of a quote from Lewis’s The Chronicles of Narnia, where the lion, Aslan, says, “I am not safe, but I am good.”*

## Profiles in Faith: J.R.R. Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*

(continued from page 1)

poet and novelist Edwin Muir (1887-1959) described *The Lord of the Rings* as “childish.” Others faulted the work for being “unrealistic” or “escapist.”

As Tolkien’s fears of criticism were realized, it must have comforted him to receive high praise as well. C.S. Lewis, who praised the book to Tolkien in private also wrote a public review on its publication:

This book is like lightning from a clear sky ... To say that in it heroic romance, gorgeous, eloquent, and unashamed, has suddenly returned at a period almost pathological in its anti-romanticism is inadequate. To us, who live in that odd period, the return—and the sheer relief of it—is doubtless the important thing. But in the history of romance itself ... it makes not a return but an advance or revolution: the conquest of new territory.

W.H. Auden (1907-73), noted American poet, wrote in *The New York Times*, “No fiction I have read in the last five years has given me more joy.” Later in a radio program, he said about *The Lord of the Rings*: “If someone dislikes it, I shall never trust their literary judgment about anything again.” Bernard Levin (1928- ), British journalist and critic, wrote in *Truth*, that this work was “one of the most remarkable works of literature in our, or any, time. It is comforting, in this troubled day, to be once more assured that the meek shall inherit the earth.”

In a response to the charge that fairy stories like *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Chronicles of Narnia* were childish, C.S. Lewis distinguished between fairy tales and children’s stories. He pointed out that many children don’t like fairy tales, and many adults do. Fairy tales, he argued, are associated with children because in some circles they are out of fashion with adults. Some claim to be disenchanted with such literature, but one might question whether they have ever risen so high as to be enchanted by anything. It would be better to call them unenchanted. Lewis argues in a number of places that juvenile taste is merely human taste. A good story is a good story no matter your age. In fact, when you cease to retain some aspects of childlikeness, you lose something of your humanity. As Jesus said, whoever enters the kingdom must do so as a child (Mt. 18:1f).

To the charge of “escapism,” Tolkien responded clearly along these lines: Yes, fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. Consider a soldier imprisoned by the

enemy; don’t we consider it his duty to escape? Similarly, many culture shapers would put us all in their “prison.” If we value freedom of the mind and soul, if we are advocates of liberty, then it’s our duty to escape and to take as many people with us as we can! In “On Fairy Stories” he wrote:

Yes,  
fantasy is  
escapist,  
and  
that is its  
glory.

Why should a man be scorned if, when finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or, if when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. In using Escape in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word, and, what is more, they are confusing ... the Escape of the Prisoner with the flight of the Deserter.

In other words, to escape from a false view of reality to a truer view of reality is not an escape from reality but an escape to reality. James Schall, in an essay titled “On Reality of Fantasy,” observes that often while reading fantasy he finds himself “pondering the state of his own soul.” In a similar way novelist Steven Lawhead maintains that:

the best of fantasy offers not an escape from reality but an escape to a heightened reality....In the very best fantasy literature, like *The Lord of the Rings*, we escape into an ideal world where ideal heroes and heroines (who are really only parts of our true selves) behave ideally. The work describes human life as it might be lived, perhaps ought to be lived, against a backdrop, not of all happiness and light, but of crushing difficulty and overwhelming distress.

Perhaps the overwhelming response to the films thus far and to the book is due to the fact that this epic story touches something deep in our humanity as created in the image of God—showing us something of how life is to be lived—fighting against the domination of evil forces, sacrificing comfort, a finger, or even life, if necessary—ordinary characters doing extraordinary acts of courage.

### Process

*The Lord of the Rings* was almost not written—and then almost not published. Its origins started with threads

from Tolkien's past. Once in his Oxford undergraduate studies he encountered the cryptic couplet "Hail Earendel brightest of angels, over Middle Earth sent to men." In old English the word "Middangeard" was the word for "this world" between Heaven above and Hell beneath. The word captured his imagination, and he mused about the idea of Middle Earth. Later, during his professorship at Oxford, he made extra money grading School Certificate exams. He recalled:

One of the candidates had mercifully left one of the pages with no writing on it (which is the best that can possibly happen to an examiner) and I wrote on it: 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.' Names always generate a story in my mind. Eventually I thought I'd better find out what hobbits were like.

According to Tolkien's children's recollections, the first tales about hobbits may have been made up spontaneously for their entertainment, and then later the tales were put down on paper and read to them. This early written form was shown to C.S. Lewis, who encouraged his friend "Tollers," as he called him, to finish the book and seek its publication. After some time, the finished book was given to Stanley Unwin, the chairman of a publishing company, who, as a test, gave the manuscript to his ten-year-old son, Rayner. The boy read the book and wrote a very positive report. *The Hobbit* was then published and was an immediate success. Tolkien then gave Unwin the book of his heart, his lifelong work, *The Silmarillion*, to consider for his next publication. While not finally rejecting it, Unwin asked for more hobbit adventures, and so the "New Hobbit" — *The Lord of the Rings* — was begun, and many elements from *The Silmarillion* made an appearance in the trilogy.

It took sixteen years from the beginning of the writing process to the book's publication. Many times Tolkien put the manuscript on the shelf only to be encouraged by C.S. Lewis and others to take up the project again. At times Tolkien despaired over the growing size of the work. He wrote to his publisher:

I am, I fear, a most unsatisfactory person, now I look at it, the magnitude of the disaster is apparent to me. My work has escaped from my control, and I have produced a monster: an immensely long, complex, rather bitter, and very terrifying romance, quite unfit for children (if fit for anybody).

Fortunately, Unwin had the courage to take what was considered a great risk. Unwin hedged his bets and wrote the contract stipulating that Tolkien would receive no royalties until all costs were covered, after which Tolkien and the publisher would split profits fifty/fifty. While this arrangement appeared to favor the publisher, it worked out to Tolkien's benefit.

It was also decided that the very large book should be divided into three volumes, thus its present form. Additionally, the volumes were published one after another with some time in between. It was about a year between the publication of *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*, a time span of which *The Illustrated London News* reviewer said, "The suspense is cruel."

#### Themes

In an article of this length, it is impossible to do justice to the characters and themes of *The Lord of the Rings*. I can, however, offer a few thoughts that might enhance a reader's appreciation or understanding of the themes — as well as point to sources for more extended treatment of these and other issues at the end of this article.

**HOBBITS:** One of the sources of abiding appeal in *The Lord of the Rings* (and *The Hobbit*) is the characterization of hobbits. Though imaginary, these creatures are based on a real source. Tolkien once told an interviewer, "The hobbits are just rustic English people, made small in size because it reflects the generally small reach of their imagination — not the small reach of their courage or latent power."

Tolkien described the character of hobbit Sam Gamgee as "a reflection of the English soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recog-

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the word  
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beneath. The  
word captured his  
imagination, and  
he mused about  
the idea of  
Middle Earth.*

(continued on page 18)

## Profiles in Faith: J.R.R. Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*

(continued from page 17)

nized as so far superior to myself." So, in many ways, the Shire is England.

Tolkien very much related to the hobbits. He once wrote:

I am a hobbit in all but size. I like gardens, trees, and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe and like good, plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humor (which even my appreciative critics find tiresome); I go to bed late and get up late (if possible). I do not travel much.

Once a BBC radio interviewer asked whether, as his books indicate, he placed great value in "home, fire, pipe, bed." Tolkien's surprised response was, "Don't you?" His emotional connection with the imaginary halflings was further revealed in his recollection of writing about the hero's welcome that is given to the hobbits on the Field of Cormallen: Tolkien revealed that he "actually wept."

At a dinner speech in Holland (1958), Tolkien gave what has been called a toast to hobbits. At the end of the speech, Tolkien said,

... it is exactly twenty years since I began in earnest to complete the history of our revered hobbit-ancestors of the Third Age. I look East, West, North, South, and I do not see Sauron; but I see that Saruman has many descendants. We hobbits have against them no magic weapons. Yet, my gentle hobbits, I give you this toast: To the Hobbits. May they outlast the Sarumans and see spring again in the trees.

**THEOLOGY:** Patrick Curry, author of *Defending Middle Earth*, advocates a non-theistic interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings* while others, such as George Sayer, friend of Tolkien, maintains that it is a "profoundly Christian book."

While *The Lord of the Rings* contains no explicit religious reference and can be inter-

preted without a theistic or Christian reference, a glance at the books and essays about the work reveals that many find theological themes implicit in the trilogy. Tolkien's own comments offer significant insight.

Tolkien explains (paradoxically) about *The Lord of the Rings*:

That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like religion, to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.

He wrote, "The Incarnation of God is an infinitely greater thing than anything I would dare to write."

The history of Middle Earth is prior to the Incarnation and after the Fall. As Tolkien describes it: "The Fall of Man is in the past and off stage; the Redemption of Man is far off in the future. We are in a time when the one God, Eru, is known to exist by the wise." *The Silmarillion* provides much of the "theological" context for *The Lord of the Rings*.

Colin Gunton, in the article "The Far-Off Gleam of the Gospel," writes,

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 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.

It could be convincingly argued that this absolute clarity about good and evil is possible only in a theistic system. Could one of the reasons for the popularity of the films and books be the repressed desire for moral clarity in a relativistic age?

It can be further argued that each of the four main heroes is a kind of "Christ figure" offering his life for others—Gandalf, Strider/Aragorn, Frodo, and Sam. Stratford Caldecott,

The  
Incarnation  
of God  
is an  
infinitely  
greater thing  
than  
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would dare  
to write.

founder and co-director of the Centre for Faith & Culture, Oxford, maintains,

Each of the four main heroes undergoes a kind of death and rebirth as part of their quest, a descent into the underworld. In this way each participates to a greater or lesser degree in the archetypal journey of Christ.

**IMMORTALITY:** In a letter Tolkien tells a friend that the central theme of *The Lord of the Rings* is the temptation to immortality. Sean McGrath, in the article, "The Passion According to Tolkien," says that Bilbo, Frodo, Aragorn, Gandalf, and Galadriel all face temptation "to use the power of the Ring to inflate their present state of being beyond all decency and make themselves into a Dark Lord, all-powerful and immortal."

**PROVIDENCE:** It is often indicated that a force beyond their awareness is moving events towards a destiny, yet their choices are important. Joseph Pearce argues that "The ending of *The Lord of the Rings* is a triumph of Providence over Fate, but it is also a triumph of Mercy, in which free will supported by grace, is fully vindicated."

Novelist Steven Lawhead comments:

What an extraordinary thing, I thought, though Tolkien makes never so much as a glancing reference to Jesus Christ in a single paragraph of all *The Lord of the Rings'* thick volumes, His face is glimpsed on virtually every page.

**MYTH:** One of the reasons that Tolkien didn't feel a need to be explicit about his faith in *The Lord of the Rings* was rooted in his understanding of myth.

He wrote in one of his letters,

I believe that legends and myths are largely made of "truth," and indeed present aspects of it can only be perceived in this mode; and long ago certain truths and modes of this kind were discovered and must always reappear.

The mark of a good fairy story is a great eucatastrophe (a "good" catastrophe) that leads to the happy ending. It denies, says Tolkien, "the universal final defeat and in so far is evangelium, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief."

Tolkien argues in the epilogue to his essay "On Fairy Stories" that

...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....There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true...

C.S. Lewis expressed this idea of Tolkien's that became so important to him in a letter to Arthur Greeves. "Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened...."

**NATURE:** One of the qualities that endears Tolkien to many is his wonder at nature and his profound dislike for forces that would destroy it. This ecological motif shines through in many places: The orcs carelessly destroy the trees; Saruman does not care for growing things but delights in destruction. On the other hand, the most attractive characters are those who show wonder and delight at nature. Tom Bombadil combines wisdom, innocence, and freedom, singing and dancing often.

The joy Tolkien found in nature could be seen in his imaginary characters. Quickbeam, an ent introduced to the hobbits by Treebeard,

often laughed. He laughed if the sun came out from behind a cloud; he laughed if they came upon a stream or spring. Then he stooped and splashed his feet and head with water, and he laughed sometimes at some sound or whisper in the trees.

(continued on page 21)

*...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....There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true...*

## C.S. Lewis on Chronological Snobbery

(continued from page 5)

### *Novelty*

It is difficult for us to believe that the newest is not the best. Lewis points out earlier in his inaugural address at Cambridge the problem of our time. It is even a greater problem for us than for Lewis. In this day of cell phones, faxes, CDs, and DVDs, we quickly learn the value of new technology. In one generation, vinyl records have been replaced by audio tapes and then compact discs—and MP3 players are fast gaining acceptance. VHS tapes are quickly being superseded by DVDs. What will the next generation bring? Lewis says:

... in the world of machines the new is most often really better and the primitive really is the clumsy. And this image, potent in all our minds, reigns almost without rival in the minds of the uneducated ... our assumption that everything is provisional and soon to be superseded, that the attainment of goods we have never yet had, rather than the defense of and conservation of those we have already, is the cardinal business of life, would shock and bewilder them [people of the past] if they could visit ours.

This desire for the newest and latest is not only a powerful drive in twenty-first century technology, but it can be a drive in the realm of ideas and values as well. Many voices in the contemporary educational establishment proclaim that the newest is the best. We are tempted to follow the newest philosophy, read the newest books, and come up with a novel perspective as our own. This “temptation to novelty” needs further consideration. Theologian Thomas Oden is a model in this regard. Earlier in his life he was a respected published liberal theologian. Once when leaving on a sabbatical, he could only take a limited number of books. He was shocked when he looked at the books he had chosen. None of the newest fad theologies were included—only old classics. Gradually he worked his way back to what C.S. Lewis called “mere Christianity” or what Vincent of Lerins called that which is held “everywhere, always and by all.” Oden had a dream in which he saw his own tombstone on which was written, “He

contributed nothing new.” As he thought about this, he came to see that novelty had consumed his life up until then. He determined in his life and in his new theology series to “teach nothing new.” He found it necessary to resist the thrust of his education in order “to overcome the constant temptation to novelty.”

An ancient proverb maintains, “what is true is not new and what is new is not true.” While we certainly can and should try to unearth new insight from the Scriptures, we need to be cautious if our new nuggets differ radically from views held in the past. Perhaps those past views need correction, and we are the ones to do it. However, if we greatly differ from the giants of the faith, we need to be open to the possibility that it is *we*, not *they*, who need correction.

It is not necessarily wrong to contribute a novel perspective in our field, but it is best not to seek novelty or originality as an end in itself. Lewis resists the assumption that to be “original” is the main purpose of life. He says:

No man who values originality will ever be original. But try to tell the truth as you see it, try to do any bit of work as well as it can be done for the work’s sake, and what men call originality will come unsought.

Originality or novelty is, then, best sought indirectly (by doing good work) rather than directly.

So in answer to those who would call us “outmoded,” “old fashioned,” “dinosaurs,” “medieval,” “ancient,” “Victorian,” or “Modernist,” we might formulate our reply along these lines ...

You know maybe I am a dinosaur. I certainly maintain that the truth I hold to is not new.

- First, do you really hold to a “chronological snobbery” that denies that any past beliefs could be considered true? Has my “old fashioned” view ever been shown to be false? If so, where, and how conclusively?

(continued on page 21)

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## Profiles in Faith: J.R.R. Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*

(continued from page 19)

Treebeard's way of speaking was inspired by C.S. Lewis's booming voice—"Hrum, Hroom." Treebeard is especially angry at the orcs' destruction of trees. He says,

Many of these trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost for ever now. And there are wastes of stump and bramble where once were singing groves.

Many more observations could be made to illustrate central themes of *The Lord of the Rings*. The trilogy speaks—at least implicitly—against those forces that would destroy community, nature, and clear moral values. *The Lord of the Rings* makes us especially aware of the temptations of power and the need to resist them. As the central characters work for the salvation of Middle Earth from the Dark Forces we are made aware that unlikely heroes can accomplish great feats if they overcome their fears. Gandalf's words are applicable to us:

Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron himself is but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master 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 field 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.

The present popularity of *The Lord of the Rings* is an opportunity for believers to discuss the themes present in the films and books that so clearly have theological overtones. Could the resonance of these themes in many people's minds and hearts point to the "far-off gleam" or echo of evangelium? Could this great work demonstrating eucatastrophe become a pointer to the greatest eucatastrophe—the myth become fact—in Jesus Christ and the Gospel? Perhaps the echo is not so faint or far off. ■

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### SOURCES

Some secondary works that might prove helpful in your exploration of these themes:

Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien* – an excellent authorized biography.

Joseph Pearce, *Tolkien: A Celebration* – a great collection of essays.

Joseph Pearce, *Tolkien: Man and Myth* – beautifully weaves together biography and literary themes.

Tom Shippey, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* – in-depth study of literary themes.

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### Lewis on Chronological Snobbery

(continued from page 20)

- Second, are you aware that our own "period" might have illusions and blind spots, as postmodernists are so quick to point out? Could we correct our blind spots by listening to people from other cultures and from other ages?
- Third, is development best sought by leaving things behind as on a road or by drawing life from them as from a root?
- Fourth, we certainly don't have to "turn back the clock" – except when it's telling the wrong time.
- Fifth, aren't the most modern or postmodern views really enslaved to the recent past?
- Sixth, maybe I am a dinosaur, but wouldn't you listen a little while to one if you could?
- Seventh, the latest might be the best in technology, but not necessarily with respect to the true, the good, and the beautiful, and especially not with the eternal, unchanging God.

Finally, you might respond as Lewis did: "If you take your stand on the prevalent view, how long do you think it will prevail ... All you can say about my taste is that it is old fashioned; yours will soon be the same."

Could the resonance of these themes in many people's minds and hearts point to the "far-off gleam" or echo of evangelium?

## Why Pray?

by Thomas A. Tarrants, III  
President, C.S. Lewis Institute



Tom Tarrants

*Does God's omnipotence make prayer an unnecessary exercise?*

**Y**es, why pray? If God is omniscient, doesn't he know everything we need? And if he is both omnipotent and good, won't he provide it whether we pray or not? So goes a common line of reasoning about prayer which influences many of us, to our own impoverishment and the detriment of Christ's kingdom.

This reasoning has a certain logic and seems to have some biblical plausibility. Scripture clearly tells us that God is all-knowing: "Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account" (Heb. 4:13), and that he is all-powerful and "...does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'" (Da. 4:35), and that "...the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations" (Ps.100:5).

However, to infer from these truths that prayer is unnecessary is to overlook the broader teaching of Scripture. The Bible does indeed teach that everything we need for life

and godliness is found in God, who is willing and able to give it and knows our need before we ask. But it does not teach that he bestows these riches upon us automatically, as a matter of right. Jesus says:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. (Mt. 7:7)

Have faith in God.... whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mk. 11:22, 24)

This kind can come out only by prayer. (Mk. 9:29)

Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. (Lk. 22:46)

If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer. (Mt. 21:22)

...they should always pray and not give up. (Lk. 18:1)

The clear import of these and similar passages is that, in many instances, we can lay hold of God's promises only through believing prayer.

John Calvin places great stress on the importance of prayer, saying: "Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is ... (*Institutes* III, 20, 2). He held that it is, "...by the benefit of prayer that we reach those riches which are laid up for us with the Heavenly Father" and that

...after we have been instructed by faith to recognize that whatever we need and whatever we lack is in God... it remains for us to seek in him, and in prayers to ask of him,

what we have learned to be in him. (*Institutes* III, 20, 1)

He saw no conflict between prayer and providence but, rather, taught that in prayer "...we invoke the presence both of his providence ... and of his power..." (*Institutes* III, 20, 2).

Prayer and providence then, far from being antithetical, are actually reciprocal. Providence inspires prayer and prayer invokes providence. Here divine sovereignty and human responsibility mysteriously converge in a way we cannot fully explain but which is nonetheless real.

By failing to pray, can we forfeit personal blessings which God would otherwise bestow? It does appear that in his sovereignty God has ordained believing prayer as a necessary means for our receiving many of his promises. Therefore, James can say "You do not have because you do not ask" (4:2). And, Calvin says

...to us nothing is promised to be expected from the Lord, which we are not also bid-den to ask of him in prayers... and he is inactive, as if forgetting us, when he sees us idle and mute (*Institutes* III, 20, 2-3).

And so, while some measure of blessing comes to everyone because God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good," it is only through prayer that we lay hold of many of the riches he promises.

By failing to pray, can we hinder the work of God's kingdom? Scripture is clear that ultimately God's kingdom will prevail over the kingdoms of this world and that his purposes will be fulfilled. Yet, Scripture also teaches that believing prayer is somehow a significant part of that process. Jesus teaches us to pray "...your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven" (Mt. 6-10); and to "ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Mt. 9:38). And he promises, "I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the son may bring glory to the Father. You may

ask me anything in my name and I will do it" (Jn. 14:13-14). In Paul's ministry prayer is consistently a vital element for open doors and effective ministry (Ep. 6:19f; Col. 4:3-4; 2 Th. 3:1-2), and a key to his deliverance from prison (Php. 1:19). The Apostles devoted themselves "...to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Ac. 6:4). And, James exhorts us to imitate the faith and prayer of Elijah, saying, "the fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." (5:16-18). The inescapable conclusion from these and many similar passages is that the Sovereign God has ordered his creation in such a way as to allow prayer to play a vital part in the outworking of his purposes.

If it is true then, that the fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much, doesn't the kingdom suffer loss from missed opportunity when we neglect earnest prayer? What would have happened if Moses had not interceded for Israel on Sinai (Ex. 32:1-14), or if Elijah had neglected to pray on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki. 18:36-39), or if the Jerusalem church had not made earnest prayer for Peter as he awaited execution (Ac. 12:1-5)?

Why pray? Because the Sovereign God, who is indeed omniscient, omnipotent, and good, has established prayer as the means by which we receive what he has promised and help fulfill what he has ordained. One can only wonder what blessings we are missing today both in our personal lives and in our churches because of our failure to earnestly pray. And, one can only wonder what might yet happen if we would follow the examples of Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Whitefield, Spurgeon, and many others, who devoted themselves to prayer. Perhaps it is time for us as individuals and congregations to devote ourselves to prayer and to cry out with the Apostles,

*Lord, teach us to pray.*

*...the  
Sovereign  
God, who is  
indeed  
omniscient,  
omnipotent,  
and good, has  
established  
prayer as the  
means by  
which we  
receive what  
he has  
promised and  
help fulfill  
what he has  
ordained.*

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- ◆ **Ravi Zacharias Conference**, June 27-28, McLean Bible Church, Vienna, VA
- ◆ **Dr. Alister McGrath Conference**, Conference on: Science and Religion; October 3-4, The Falls Church (Episcopal), Falls Church, VA
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