



The Christian World of the Hobbit

Devin Brown

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In his beloved story *The Hobbit*, J.R.R. Tolkien takes readers into a world unlike any other, yet so much seems familiar. As Bilbo journeys there and back again, glimpses of the spiritual are seen.

The Christian World of The Hobbit does what no book has done: it brings Tolkien fans new delight by introducing a side of Tolkien that is rarely explored but vitally important to his writings--especially *The Hobbit*. Written by internationally regarded Tolkien-scholar Devin Brown, this approachable, witty, and highly entertaining book offers up fresh perspectives to fans of *The Hobbit*, both the book and the film adaptation.

The Christian World of the Hobbit Details

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From Reader Review The Christian World of the Hobbit for online ebook

Bob Hayton says

I remember the first time I entered the world of Middle-earth. I was twelve or thirteen and noticed an interesting little yellow book on my mother's shelf. I'm not entirely sure if she ever read it or not — as that kind of book was not what I remember her reading. But I asked if I could read it and eagerly dove in. At that age I don't believe I was even aware there was a sequel to the book. But from the first few moments I was hooked.

Fantasy literature isn't everyone's cup of tea, and all books in the genre of fantasy are not created equal. Few rise to the level of art achieved by J.R.R. Tolkien. His books, "The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings", are among the most widely read in the English language. And like countless readers of Tolkien before me, I found the world he crafted to be enchanting and alluring.

Tolkien's world, the land of Middle-earth, is a place readers long to return to. Yet spending time in Middle-earth is not an exercise in futility or a way to check out of the here and now. In an ironic fashion, Tolkien's world inspires noble efforts in the real world, and calls us all to live better and nobler lives.

Tolkien scholar Devon Brown, elaborates on this quality of Tolkien's works:

...it might also be argued that the biggest reason his works have been so deeply loved, both in the previous century and the present one, is because they not only entertain readers — they also enrich their readers' lives and make them more meaningful. (p. 11)

Brown explores the world Tolkien made in a new book "The Christian World of the Hobbit" (Abingdon Press, 2012). In this work, he demonstrates how Tolkien's Christian worldview bleeds through his written works and permeates the world he made. This aspect of Tolkien's work is puzzling to many. His books have almost no references to God or anything remotely similar to church or religion, and yet they are hailed by many as Christian novels advocating a Christian worldview. Sure there is a fight between right and wrong, and right wins — but is that enough to classify the book as Christian?

Brown's analysis uncovers abundant clues from the author himself, both inside the covers of his books, as well as from his own reflections and letters about them, which put this question to rest. Tolkien's use of the term "luck" and "good fortune" is an ironic way to point the reader toward the conclusion that it wasn't just luck or fortune, but Someone behind it all. Gandalf's statement to Bilbo on the final page of *The Hobbit* makes this clear: "You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventure and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?" Brown points out that Tolkien as much as acknowledges this in one of his letters:

In a letter, Tolkien offers this additional statement about the veiled power at work in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*: "The story and its sequel are... about the achievements of specially graced and gifted individuals. I would say... 'by ordained individuals, inspired and guided by an Emissary to ends beyond their individual education and enlargement.' This is clear in *The Lord of the Rings*; but it is present, if veiled, in *The Hobbit* from the beginning, and is alluded to in Gandalf's last words. (Letters 365)" (pp. 49-50)

Additional evidence is found in Tolkien's statements about his work being "fundamentally Christian" in

nature:

“The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision” (Letters 172). [p. 24]

“I am a Christian” and then adds in parentheses “which can be deduced from my stories” (Letters 288). [p. 26]

Tolkien’s work is Christian at its core, but not in a superficial manner. Tolkien despised allegory, and would frown on much of what passes as Christian fantasy today. Brown considers works of this type as merely “Christianized.” In contrast, Tolkien’s thoroughly Christian worldview shapes the very fabric of his stories in a subtle yet profound way. And Tolkien did desire his readers to entertain that worldview for themselves after encountering it in his stories.

Brown also explores the morality inherent in Tolkien’s view of Middle-earth. The struggle to better one’s self plays a prominent role throughout the story. Bilbo Baggins is no ordinary hero, conquering by his skill with the sword and enduring thanks to his bravado and courage. Instead Bilbo takes on himself and wins. He faces the darker parts of his heart head on: he steps out of his cottage to begin the adventure, he resists the greed and selfishness that entice him to abandon his companions, and ultimately he finds a life spent in service of others is the only truly satisfying way to live.

This book is well-written, lucid and clear. And the artistic touches throughout make it a pleasure to interact with – even in the Kindle version. It abounds with quotations from Tolkien’s work and letters, and includes pertinent quotes from other Tolkien scholars. The life of Tolkien, and his own Christian journey are recounted, as well as his famous literary society and its influence on his career. C.S. Lewis features prominently in the book – as he both knew Tolkien as a friend and appreciated his literary output (Brown is also a Lewis scholar). Throughout the book, Brown’s first-rate grasp of Tolkien scholarship is apparent and yet he manages to keep the book very accessible.

For those who have read "The Hobbit" more than once, Brown’s work will be a joy to read. Even if you are familiar with Tolkien’s work only through the films by Peter Jackson, reading "The Christian World of the Hobbit" may spur you on to read the books that have endeared themselves to generations of readers. J.R.R. Tolkien was a Catholic Christian, but his view of morality and Divine providence as conveyed through his stories, is something evangelical Christians will appreciate. Brown allows us to enter Tolkien’s universe with a well trained eye, ready to see the glimmers of the Christian worldview that permeates it all. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and highly recommend it.

Disclaimer: This book was provided by Abingdon Press. I was under no obligation to offer a favorable review.

Mikayla says

I'm not a particular fan of nonfiction, but I did enjoy this book. Some parts seemed slow, while others were pretty interesting and a few parts were inspirational. I love The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. That may be why I enjoyed this book more than the average non-fiction book. I think I would have enjoyed it more on audiobook.

Mary says

This is a wonderful book to read before the release of the new Hobbit movie. It provides fresh insight into Tolkien's worldview in writing the Hobbit as well as the Lord of the Rings trilogy. Devin Brown makes it clear at the beginning that Tolkien was definitely NOT writing a Christian allegory nor is Tolkien attempting to evangelize or preach through his writing. Brown's thesis is that Tolkien's Christian themes, such as Providence, Purpose, and Morality, are woven throughout the fabric of the narrative and are indirectly stated through the entire Middle Earth saga. A fascinating, fully developed analysis recommended for anyone who loves Tolkien.

Coyle says

Based on my limited experience, there seem to be two kinds of Tolkien scholars. The first sort are those who truly love and delight in his works and want to know more—they want to plumb the depths of Middle Earth and relish the world he has created. The second sort are those who disdain his writings, and want to kill the joy of others in reading his books. They exist seemingly solely to remind us that we're reading fiction that has no connection to the real world and is at best sentimental escapist plop. Members of this second group I have to assume also kick puppies and shove old people while wearing black and laughing manically. Devin Brown and his book thankfully fall into the first category.

Read the rest of my review here:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/schaeffe...>

Rob says

I will never read the Hobbit in the same way again! Arguably all Tolkien fans know how adamant he was that his stories were not allegories, unlike the fictional writings of his peer and friend C.S. Lewis. Professor Brown, however, highlights several Christian themes that shine through the text of both the Hobbit and the Lord of the Rings saga. The book is divided into three major themes: providence, purpose, and morality.

The theme of providence was most illuminating to me. On page 42 of the Hobbit, Bilbo recovers a key that "very luckily" fell out of the pocket of the troll before he turned to stone. This key unlocked the troll hideout that held the swords called Orcrist, Sting, and Glamdring, the latter being Gandalf's sword throughout the Lord of the Rings. It is with this weapon that Gandalf smote the ruin of the Balrog and lead to his becoming Gandalf the White. It was by the light of Sting that Bilbo found his way to Gollum, learned the abilities of the ring, and set the creature on the course that would lead him and his precious to the heart of Mount Doom. Very fortuitous indeed!

This is just one of many examples of "luck" appearing in the story, which is something negative critics are quick to highlight as unconvincing storytelling. However, the subtlety with which Tolkien employs the word shows that it is only *so-called* luck. This is a point well driven home in this book.

This thought-provoking yet easy-reading work is great for even the casual Tolkien fan.

Karen! says

J. R. R. Tolkien was a genius and a Catholic. Shockingly, these two are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the Catholic identity of Tolkien adds depth, emotion, drive, and moral fiber to the tales of Middle-Earth.

Unfortunately, this is about as deep and inspiring as the author gets in his analysis of the morality of Middle Earth. Yes, we have some nice quotes from C. S. Lewis and references to the Letters of Tolkien. He even makes a few references to *The Hobbit* and to *The Lord of the Rings*!

I was very disappointed. I am not even that big of a LotR nerd, but I found that this was a sweeping review that read more like a compilation of book reports completed by a 6th grader at 2am than a semi-scholarly investigation of the morality implicit in the Tolkien realm.

Very, very disappointed.

Paulina Hauf says

Simply enlightening. Provides insight into several concepts (including morality, Providence, sin, and luck) that are absorbed into "The Hobbit" by J.R.R. Tolkien, and explains the similarities of these to the same concepts in the Christian faith. However, I wonder what he has to say regarding the tales of the Eldar days, concerning Glorfindel, Feanor, Beren and Luthien, Hurin, Fingolfin, and all tragic heroes of the like (not to mention the very real mythology Tolkien created and was very fond of).

Michael Galdamez says

This was a fantastic book dealing with Tolkien's underlying Christian beliefs in his modern classic *The Hobbit*. Even though the book is mostly about *The Hobbit*, it really is just a quick overview (although it is pretty in-depth, nonetheless) of some of his beliefs which can be seen in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. The author, Devin Brown, just seems to use *The Hobbit* as a starting point and an axis to revolve around for easy reference. I'm sure plenty of people would hate the idea of this book, but if someone were to actually read it, they probably wouldn't be able to deny Tolkien's inherent Christian worldview.

There's a lot to learn from this book as well. It is mostly academic in nature, but it also has a devotional aspect to it as well. I was pleasantly surprised to find myself often encouraged by it. Devin Brown is a great writer, and I would love to read a *The Christian World of The Lord of the Rings* someday. He is able to blend in quotations from Tolkien scholars and the great professor himself with ease, backing up his claims any time one may doubt him.

This would be a great introduction to understanding J.R.R. Tolkien and his beliefs. But I believe it would also be a good short, easy read that might have a few new insights for the advanced Tolkien enthusiast.

Chad Warner says

An interesting but fairly shallow exploration of three Christian themes in *The Hobbit*: providence, purpose, and morality. It also covers those same themes in *The Lord of the Rings*. It discusses Tolkien's Christian faith and how he deliberately wove it into his stories. It's packed with quotes from *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's letters, Tolkien scholars, and C.S. Lewis (Tolkien's friend), as well as Bible verses.

Despite the title, it's not limited to *The Hobbit*; it also talks about *The Lord of the Rings* extensively. Don't read this if you haven't finished both *The Hobbit* and *LotR*, as there are many spoilers! This book isn't as deep as I was hoping, but it is interesting nonetheless.

Themes

- Providence: there's a benevolent force at work.
- Purpose: this force is concerned with Bilbo's spiritual benefit, and uses Bilbo's adventure to bring good to many inhabitants of Middle-Earth.
- Morality: there are such things as absolute truth, objective right and wrong, and personal responsibility. Greed is dangerous and must be rejected. Love for the ordinary and everyday is good.

Regarding providence, Tolkien said,

"The story and its sequel are ... about the achievements of specially graced and gifted individuals. I would say ... 'by ordained individuals, inspired and guided by an Emissary to ends beyond their individual education and enlargement'. This is clear in *The Lord of the Rings*; but it is present, if veiled, in *The Hobbit* from the beginning, and is alluded to in Gandalf's last words."

Deanna says

Okay, so I usually read fantasy or science fiction or something like that. It's not that I don't read things that are good for my brain -- I'm in medicine, so I'm reading science all day long, so when I choose my leisure reading, it's usually just fun things.

But this book intrigued me. First, it's fairly short. Then, just a glance through it showed me the author wasn't interested in impressing me with his great big high-falutin' vocabulary about philosophy and psychology and theology. He just wanted to say, nice and clearly, what we all recognize but perhaps only could feel instead of verbalize -- that Tolkien was obviously a deeply religious man, devoted to the idea that a person's choices can lead him toward good or evil, and that making these choices on a daily basis is what builds our character.

There are some wonderful essays about the "sacred ordinary" and other side issues. A very worthwhile book.

Guillermo says

Who would've thought I would be reading a book about Christianity. Well, probably, not the me from a couple of years back. Me now, yup, certainly. Not that my belief has changed, but rather my appreciation of content. And the possibility of reading an in depth analysis. After all, I read a book about Lost and Philosophy, and in this case, it's also a book on similar kind of analysis, only with a different subject. And I have to say, Dr Devin Brown manages to explain his points under a very interesting light

Full Review

Roger Burk says

At first I thought this book was belaboring the obvious, but it grew on me. Besides, what's obvious to me may not be to others without by prejudices. By talking about what Tolkien says fairy stories should do, to a degree it did it: Provided a reminder or recovery of meaning in life, a period of escape from the tawdry, confused details of life that distract you from its real meaning, and consolation that however bad things look now, in the end all will be well.

Peter says

"Beginning with Bilbo's unexpected party in chapter 1 with its tea, seed-cakes, buttered scones, apple-tarts, mince-pies, cheese, eggs, cold chicken, pickles, beer, coffee, and smoke rings, we find that a reverence, celebration, and love of the everyday is an essential part of Tolkien's moral vision" (page 151).

Devin Brown sets about to write a commentary of Tolkien that picks out a handful of spiritual themes in *The Hobbit*, rather than attempting to cast the whole epic of Professor Tolkien as allegory for the modern era. He selects the themes of Providence, Purpose, and the Moral Landscape of Tolkien for further examination, sometimes seeming to do little more than run through example after example of Christian elements as found in *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, and Tolkien's personal correspondence. The book goes much deeper than this however. Brown, in looking at Tolkien's own spiritual journey, is able to highlight things with which he suffered through and which influenced his writing in a somewhat-cathartic way. Echoing Tolkien's good friend and spiritual sparring partner C.S. Lewis, Brown presents Tolkien as the consummate realist who did not like to overtly insert his religious views into his work, but at the same time admitted, "*The Lord of the Rings* is...a fundamentally religious and Catholic work."

One is hard-pressed to find an author before or since J.R.R. Tolkien whose work is so bereft of anything religious on the surface, and yet so richly full of Christian subtext for those with the probing eye. It is still astonishing to think, now that I have finished the book, that Brown managed to pack in points relating to everything from Tolkien's own spiritual journey to his now-famous lecture "*On Fairy-Stories*" and his appreciating for God in the ordinary in a mere 185 pages. I would recommend this book for anyone who has ever studied Tolkien on any level, even if you do not subscribe to any Christian denomination. It will open the mind of Tolkien a bit more to your eyes and, with any luck enable you to see the white shores and far green country under a swift sunrise that he and Lewis arguably wanted all their readers to experience. In taking leaps of faith like Bilbo does when he first runs out his door after the dwarves, we find purpose in life

and a greater appreciation for the world and life God has given to all his creations.

Tim Vandenberg says

Tolkien was devoutly Catholic in his religious beliefs, and he *frequently* & *OPENLY* stated that he intended Christian religious messages, morals, ethics & principles to be conveyed through his "fairy tale" writings.

Devin Brown does an amazing job, through extensive Tolkienian quotations of his books, essays, lectures & letters, to establish the very Christian religious messages found within both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

One need not be Christian (or even religious) to appreciate the insightful & scholarly value of this book. But to ignore the religious intentions of Tolkien's works would be very detrimental to the credibility of one's own interpretations of Tolkien's tales.

Highly recommended.

Gideon says

That JRR Tolkien is the author of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* is probably the most known fact about him. That he was Christian is probably the second.

And yet, in his essay/lecture-turned-book, *The Christian World of The Hobbit*, Devin Brown belabors this point. Much time is spent giving example after example from *The Hobbit*, long after his point has been proven. In fact, this book should have been called *The Christian World of Tolkien*, or some thing similar, because Brown gives just as many examples and justifications of his thesis from *The Lord of the Rings* as Tolkien's first novel.

One particular thing I found lacking is acknowledgement of a God-character in Tolkien's Middle-Earth. Brown continually references the fact that the wisest characters like Gandalf and Elrond reference some greater plan or being who they will ultimately answer to. This is his proof of God. But for a professor that teaches on Tolkien, there is absolutely no reference to *The Silmarillion*, Tolkien's third-most famous work. *The Silmarillion* opens with God, or Eru Ilúvatar, creating divine spirits and then creating the world. This is Tolkien's clear parallel to the Catholic God, and for Brown to omit it seems disingenuous. So why omit it? Does Brown see the creation of other divine spirits to be outside of the parallels he wants to give? Or does he simply want to stick to *The Hobbit*? (Because of the myriad references to *The Lord of the Rings*, I doubt this to be the case.)

Was Tolkien a Christian? Of course. Did his world view come out in his fantasy novels? Of course. Where I'd like to have seen this expanded is in parallels to Christian apologists or contrasted with secular fiction authors. Brown often handwaving statements like (paraphrased) "Many Christians believe God acts like this" or "Tolkien's contemporaries didn't agree with this". As it stands, much of this essay reads as if it were written by a ninth grader rather than a college professor.

