

**A Monthly Report Dealing with the Relationship of Christian Faith to the World**

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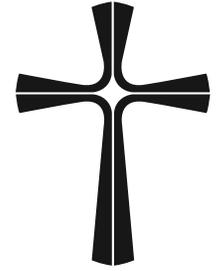


*A Barn  
to House Thee*  
By Rousas John Rushdoony

*There was no room for Him, once long ago,  
Only a cold and drafty barn, and, like a blow,  
The smell of dung did greet  
Him, Who came from heaven, none to meet  
Him, save the displaced cows and sheep  
Whose restless night disturbed His sleep.  
Only some sheep men came to pray.  
No scholars came to mark the day.*

*Still as of old the world denies  
Room to its King and from Him shies,  
The Cross His only gift from men  
And man as brutal now as then.  
Lord, if again a barn do not offend Thee,  
This dung and filth would comprehend Thee,  
Here is my heart, with its unclean floor  
A barn to house Thee, as of yore.*

Written 12-22-51 © 2002 by Dorothy Rushdoony and the Rushdoony Irrevocable Trust  
A collection of poems by the late author is now being prepared for publication.



Dear Reader,

Merry Christmas! The holidays are a time of family gatherings, and we often share memories with those we see too seldom. It is a time when we often reflect on our lives, both in the year just ending and over the more distant past. In that vein, I thought it appropriate to reflect on Chalcedon's purpose and message for this magazine and other ministries.

At Christmas we celebrate the incarnation of eternal God in human flesh. The Chalcedon Foundation and this magazine are named after the church council of A.D. 451 which clearly defined Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man. He is thus the only mediator between God and man. We believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and eternal Lord of heaven and earth. We cannot limit His Lordship or we limit His divinity and His salvation. We believe that the earth is the Lord's, the Lord Jesus Christ's, and the fullness thereof. Every area of life and thought are His rightful realm. Thus, part of our masthead always proclaims our view of Christianity as "faith for all of life."

When man fell, he chose to "be as gods, knowing (*i.e.*, determining for himself) good and evil" (*Gen. 3:5*). The first sin of man was thus playing god. Though we deserve judgment, God showed us mercy. God Himself became man to atone for our sins on Calvary, so that Easter has always been the primary Christian holy day (each Sunday also commemorates the resurrection). But what is called Christ's humiliation began with His conception and subsequent birth in Bethlehem. The physical entrance of the Messiah onto the center stage of human history was itself an act of mercy and grace worthy of celebration. His first advent was and is cause for rejoicing because it was the beginning of the literal accomplishment of man's salvation. The salvation promised to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15 was now to be a reality in Jesus Christ. The promise of a messiah was now a reality in the person of the Messiah. God's promised redemption was soon to be accomplished redemption.

Jesus Christ came to save sinners from the consequences of their own rebellion and its lust to repeat the first sin of playing god. Christ thus reverses the fall, a process not to be completed until the resurrection when the "last enemy," death, is destroyed. But God saves men from sin and guilt, not from life. The redeemed man is saved to live his life in terms of this faith. The church has used two very Biblical words to describe this. *Justification* is an act, a one-time divine declaration that we are righteous because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We receive this unmerited justification by God's grace through faith alone. *Sanctification* is the on-going work of God's Holy Spirit in us that causes us to increasingly hate sin and love righteousness. Sanctification is our Christian growth in grace that is evidenced by our increased faithfulness to the Word of God. It has been the purpose of Chalcedon, since 1965, to encourage the church in the edification of believers for their sanctification, to teach them that ours is a "faith for all of life."

Believers must "name the name" of Jesus Christ. They must self-consciously see themselves as defined by their faith. They must see themselves as believers in Jesus Christ, as members of His church, as citizens of His kingdom. This need not preclude other responsibilities, identifications, or loyalties, only their subordination to the priority of Christ and His demands. The believer must first personally submit himself to Christ and the Word and then seek to understand his responsibilities, his vocation, his arts, his science and all things within the same context of faithfulness. It is Chalcedon's view that sanctification, growth in grace, is characterized by this enlarged view of the faith as "for all of life."

Man, the rebellious sinner, still playing god, wants to believe he is a being of reason or emotion or, perhaps, biological process. The believer sees these as aspects of man's creaturehood, but sees himself as a creature of faith. This faith is not limited to merely spiritual matters, for the incarnate Messiah leaves us to grow in grace in a sometimes painfully real, physical world. The incarnate God who will raise our bodies on the day of judgment does not limit His claim on us or the world to the spiritual; His claims must not be so arbitrarily limited. Man claimed the role of deity in Eden; believers have given up such a pretense. The church, as a body of believers living and dead, has as its head, its deity, Jesus Christ. The church must point to Jesus Christ as its Shiloh, "He whose right it is." Christ's right is total, it is over all heaven and earth. It is not limited to the spiritual realm.

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Because Jesus Christ is Lord, all competing claims are wicked pretense. All men are limited in authority because Jesus Christ is God and man. No other man or institution has any right to claim that role or its authority. Even the church has limited authority. The head of the church, Jesus Christ, is Lord, not the church itself or any particular manifestation of its organization. The church preaches a Lord and Savior whose authority is total, but leaves men at liberty before God in areas not under its authority. Likewise we must call the state to a limited role, for the power of the sword combined with man's natural inclination to play god has frequently led the state arrogantly to assume the role of an all-knowing, all-wise god rather than that of an (ad)minister of justice.

Liberty is an important element of the Christian message. The gospel of Jesus Christ gives men their essential freedom from the curse of sin and guilt. Believers are freed in this way by the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, "He whose right it is." Because Jesus Christ the Lord frees men, and Christians see unlimited human power as a repetition of the first sin of playing god, the rise of Christianity saw the rise of limited constitutional authority. When men see Christ as Lord, liberty under law is possible.

The Christian believes in liberty because he believes in the rule of God and he believes that man is primarily responsible to Him, not other men. The basic government of the Christian is thus self-government. Church, state, family, and other law spheres have very real responsibilities and authority, because in their respective spheres they are responsible to God for their ministry of righteousness. No sphere has total authority, however, because that right is God's alone. The family and church are, in different ways, to encourage personal growth in grace of the individual, and the state is to be a ministry of justice so that man can serve God in a context of liberty. Chalcedon has thus sought to encourage various spheres in developing a self-conscious understanding of their role in advancing the kingdom of Christ the Lord. Many churches today are strong advocates of this dominion theology; the Christian day and home-school movements are perhaps the greatest areas of Christian cultural advance of the last generation; there is even a powerful, though small, force in the political area that stands for justice and righteousness and which seeks to further the Christian heritage of individual liberty.

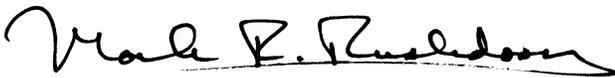
The message that Chalcedon has set forth is not easily defined in a "mission statement." Because we believe in a sovereign God and a victorious Savior "whose right it is" in a time when the faith seems in retreat, the challenge before us, before the entire church of Jesus Christ, is real. It is also a rare and exciting opportunity to serve.

Chalcedon belongs to the long tradition of Christian orthodoxy. We advocate precise theology, not as scholarly penchant, but in faithfulness to God. Man's word tends to muddle God's Word. Precise theology, however, must never be a narrow academic exercise because we view our faith as an all-encompassing one. We are thus not past-bound, except to honor the faithful saints and their work that has gone before us. We are future-oriented, in part because of our optimistic eschatology, but also because the Christian life must be one of growth and faithfulness. Chalcedon's ministry focuses on the sanctification of believers, but in a much broader development than the pietistic tradition. We believe Christians are not here just to be blessed, but to work and grow in grace. We are called, even like Adam before the Fall, to work; many of our Lord's parables were about the duties of servants to work and advance their master's interests in His absence.

We believe that the future is in God's hands. As His children we have been promised a share in His inevitable victory. No rebellion will, in the end, remain. Our duty, then, is personal faithfulness and to use our energies and resources to encourage such in our homes, churches, social relationships, communities, and culture.

This is Chalcedon's message. We work not because we see victory as imminently ours; we work because we see victory as assuredly Christ's.

Sincerely,

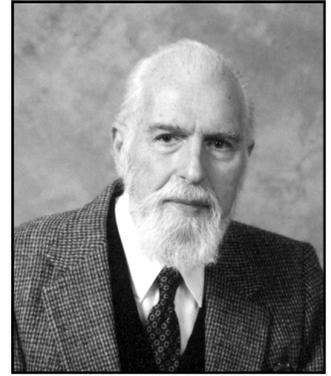


President

# Incarnation and History: “He Whose Right It Is”

By R. J. Rushdoony

(Delivered to a Chalcedon Guild Dinner, December 9, 1974)



**T**he first proclamations of the coming of Jesus Christ go back to the very beginnings of history, to the birth of time. In the Garden of Eden, as sentence is passed on mankind, the promise is given of restoration through the seed of the woman, who shalt “bruise,” or literally, *crush* the Serpent’s head (*Gen. 3:15*). The coming of the promised Son is the institution of victory.

Later, the dying Jacob prophesied concerning the coming of the Son. Again there is the note of militancy and victory. The Son is to come through the Tribe of Judah, and Judah’s military power is particularly noted. The great Victor of all history is to be born of warrior’s blood. “Judah is a lion’s whelp,” Jacob declared, one who goes up, or grows up, on prey (*Gen. 49:9*).

But Judah is only a custodian of power, a symbol of dominion, who holds his sway until the Great One comes, He whose right it is. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (*Gen. 49:10*). Power must be husbanded for the Man of Power, Shiloh. The Jewish Targums paraphrase “until Shiloh comes,” with “until the time when the King Messiah comes to whom it belongeth.” The scepter of power and dominion belong to the Christ, and the source of law is the ultimate law-giver, the Christ. *Shiloh* is a name of the Messiah, and it can mean “To whom it belongs,” or “he whose (right) it is.”

The meaning of the name *Judah* is “God shall be praised.” Jacob began his prophecy, “Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise.” In Genesis 29:35, we read that Leah “conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the Lord — therefore she called his name Judah.” The hand of Judah, Jacob went on to declare, “shall be on the neck of thine enemies,” and his brothers would acknowledge his authority and power. As E. W. Hengstenberg declared, “Judah would be his brothers’ forechampion in the warfare against the world, and God has endowed him with conquering power against the enemies of His kingdom.” But the meaning of Judah is Shiloh, and in Shiloh dominion

will be realized. As Solomon declared, “All kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him” (*Pss. 72:11*). David was equally emphatic: “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (*Pss. 22:17*). Again, “All nations whom thou has made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name” (*Pss. 86:9*).

The Messiah is the One to whom all dominion, power, and authority belong: He is Shiloh, He whose right it is. The scepter of dominion is His, and He is the law-giver and the source of all law. His coming will mark the beginning of a battle unto victory against all who arrogate dominion unto themselves.

According to Numbers 24:17, a scepter, the scepter of world and universal dominion, rises out of Israel in the person of the Messiah. He shall arise to wage war against and to destroy all sons of the tumult (or Sheth, *Num. 24:17*). The tumult of the nations shall give way to the reign of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

Unto Him shall be “the gathering” or *obedience* of the peoples (*Gen. 49:10*). Jesus Christ has a title to and an absolute claim on the obedience of all peoples, and He shall establish this right by overturning all things that deny, neglect, or oppose *Him*. The name Shiloh, He whose right it is, is echoed in Ezekiel 21:27, wherein God declares, concerning the ancient world, “I will overturn, overturn, overturn it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.” The whole of the Old Testament era is a great shaking of the nations, a shattering of the conspiracies of men against God, to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. Now that He has come, the great and final shaking is underway. Its meaning, St. Paul declared, is “the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (*Heb. 12:27*).

Therefore, when Christ, the Great Overturner, was born, the world in the person of King Herod struck at Him, striving to kill Him, knowing that Christ alive meant the defeat and death of the fallen world order.

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Earth and hell joined in the events of His birth, temptation, trial, and crucifixion, in a grand design to overturn God's plan, to shake God's eternal decree, and to establish their own pretended right.

The issue was joined: *Who is Shiloh? The whole point of the fall was that man said, I am Shiloh, I am he whose right it is.* This is and must be a democratic universe, one in which every man has the right to be his own god, choosing or determining what constitutes good and evil for himself. There is no paradise of man possible apart from this faith. On this premise, fallen man operates, and on this premise he claims autonomy, declaring his independence from God and man, from all morality not made by man, and from all claims of authority over him. And the result, from the days of the judges to the present is the same, whenever and wherever God the Sovereign King is denied: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (*Jud. 21:25*).

## The State as Shiloh

So too the modern state declares itself to be Shiloh, he whose right it is. The modern state acknowledges no law beyond itself, no law-giver save itself, no savior beyond man, and no binding power beyond time and history. It sometimes disguises its hatred by a show of tolerance for Christianity, but that toleration is itself a form of declaring that Biblical faith is irrelevant. If the claims of Scripture and the God of Scripture are true, then there is no way in which men and institutions can sidestep the absolute requirement of total submission to Jesus Christ as Lord. Their option is only Christ for judgment: there is no life apart from Him, not any order possible in contempt of him.

For the state to attempt, as twentieth century states do, to establish an order apart from Christ is to say that God is not the Lord, and that the universe is open to other claims of deity and sovereignty.

At the first Christmas, the battle was joined, church (the priests), state (Herod), and fallen humanity against the Christ-child. At the crucifixion, the battle continued, with priests, Sanhedrin, and Rome united in striving to destroy the King. In virtually every capitol in the world today, the battle continues, as new sanhedrins, called parliaments, congresses, national assemblies, and like names, seek to set aside and suppress the claims of Christ as absolute Lord and only Savior. The new Herods and Pilates seek sanctimoniously to wash their hands of Him and then to go about their own great business of creating a paradise on earth without God, and the only result is hell on earth.

Gil Elliott in his *Twentieth Century Book of the Dead* (1972), tells us that in the twentieth century, the era of the triumph of humanism, between 89 and 159 million people have died in war and revolution, and their related violences, famines, slave labor camps, and the like. His statistics err on the side of conservatism; at some points, very able historians would even double the figure. Nor does he include other forms of mass murders, such as abortions. What Elliot does point out, however, is that every attempt to call some other era more bloody is untenable: "[E]very attempt to do so shows the twentieth century to be incomparably the more violent period." (This, of course, does not deter humanistic scholars from viewing with horror the sins of Christian rulers in the past, while seeing all the events of the present as a prelude to paradise. But, as Solzhenitsyn observes, in *The Gulag Archipelago*, "pride grows in the human heart like lard on a pig.")

To the question, *Who is Shiloh?*, the twentieth century rarely answers, *Jesus Christ*. Even among those who profess to call Him Savior, too few will also acknowledge Him to be the Lord. But, if He is not our Lord, He is not our Savior. Jesus Christ is not an insurance agent, writing out an insurance policy on us, and then making no further claim on us, as long as our policy is paid up with modest sums from time to time. He is Shiloh, He whose right it is, and He will not surrender His sovereignty unto any other.

Because Jesus Christ is Shiloh, our world is under judgment for refusing to acknowledge Him Lord and Savior. These troubled times should not distress or trouble us: they are evidences that Shiloh is at work, shaking the things which can be shaken, so that the unshakeable may alone remain. He will overturn our humanistic world, shatter its pride, autonomy, and complacency, and He shall reign in both judgment and in peace. It is He and not the world who is our peace. In the troubled world of His birth, the glorious song of the heavenly host was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (*Lk. 2:14*). The meaning of this peace, our Savior-King declares, is Himself. "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition" between God and man (*Eph. 2:14*). By means of His grace and law-word, all things are to be brought into and under His peace. His strong and calming word to us is this: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (*Jn. 14:27*).

# The Need for Discernment in Imaginative Literature

By *Ronald Kirk*



**I**modern romantic notions inflict unrealistic expectations of life leading to disappointment and failed relationships. Young people are particularly susceptible. Similarly, occult practice seeks to assert autonomous power over life. Such humanism tends to use lawless expediencies to control life and effect personal satisfaction. Both result from original sin and are rampant in contemporary literature. To recognize subtle evil in the form of pretty temptation requires a developed discernment. Conversely, a godly imagination provides one of the most apt means to communicate Biblical truth. Because imaginative literature can powerfully influence for good or evil, particularly in movies, Christians should make thematic discernment a high priority in education and practice. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and other Christian fantasies offer a fair test of Christian discernment.

## The Importance of Literature

Imaginative literature — such as stories and poetry — focuses on some aspect of life in an idealized form. The poet, believing he has caught a glimmer of truth, clothes his Idea with a metaphor that he believes will effectively pique another person's imagination. If the poet is skillful and his thought is true, his Idea will reach the depths of his neighbor's soul, just as it did his own. In the hands of the godly, such art may quicken the believer to a greater appreciation of God's creation; of His providence; and of His salvation, grace, and lordship. If the poetic artist truly represents God's reality, he can greatly contribute to the kingdom of God. Otherwise, he may exert a destructive influence.

Moreover, as the writer labors to express himself, he necessarily reflects his time, its beliefs, its struggles, and its aspirations. Godly imaginative literature can portray the great character of God's faithful ones with due reverence, friendship, love, self-sacrifice, and true liberty. Good literature can contrast godliness with poor and sinful character. Literature in general can provide a graphic legacy of

moral struggles, of elevated or low historical eras, and of the need for repentance from cultural sins. Literature can reveal God's providential legacy, to His glory and a people's edification. Literature represents a powerful instrument for education.

## Imagination

Imagination is a gift from God, but it may be used for good or evil. The imagination abstracts the qualities of various known things and assembles them in a new form. This is the heart of human creativity. Interestingly, God called the Tabernacle architects of ancient Israel by name and commanded them to fashion the images of pomegranates as decoration. He commanded the graving of cherubim images. The representational arts are a good use of a godly imagination. Christ enlists the godly imagination when He speaks in parables. The imagination enables us to understand holy things that our senses cannot know. A *vain* imagination assumes the seat of God. Romantic desire is vain imagination. The vain imagination produces flattering thoughts, removing one from fellowship with God and leading one to self-destruction. It thinks more highly of itself than it ought. The vain imagination deifies itself.

The line between a fruitful, Christ-centered imagination and a humanistic, vain one may be difficult to determine and harder to maintain. Biblically perfect expression remains beyond our ability, though we must ever press on toward maturity and fulfillment of God's purpose for us. A timid imagination applied to arts produces banality or insipidity. An aggressively vain imagination may yield pompous and self-serving ugliness and evil. The horror genre is a good example. Early twentieth century humanists purposely designed art, music, and poetry to offend the sensibilities of the uninitiated. As sinners, Christians are not immune from a perverse impulse to glory. The glory of gifted and commanding human brilliance, balanced by the need to glorify God, will always tax the

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creativity and righteousness of the Christian. What God grants to His humble, yet faithful, servant often proves itself classic — of lasting value — as we may commonly observe through Christian history.

Missing the perfect mark is not necessarily good grounds for condemnation. Individuals and cultures are sanctified progressively. Bold initial enterprise is dangerous and often produces a less than satisfactory result. Though the fight for godly ideas must persist, Christian persons should not be its casualties. Jesus said, “Judge not that ye be not judged.” We ought not so quickly condemn men like John Locke, who, though on one hand furthered anti-Christian thought in the world of philosophy,<sup>1</sup> was evangelically devout and used of God in the cause of American liberty.<sup>2</sup> Christian responsibility requires discernment — keeping what is good. Let us accept the contributions of our very human brothers with grace and then push on to discover an ever better way. Where so many frontiers lie before us in godly human endeavor, some questions may remain until a greater body of wisdom develops to judge them. For now, may it please God, we should continue to question, test, evaluate, and correct, with grace. We ought always to attempt to cite the governing Biblical principle by faith, and then leave judgment to the marketplace of Biblical ideas where iron sharpens iron. Where brethren may be wrong, paraphrasing the American Pilgrim pastor John Robinson, *advertise them brotherly*.

## Fantasy

Because setting a story in a mythological or unworldly place appeals to us in a way that mundane life cannot, fantasy is particularly seductive. The danger in desiring fantasy and the world of imagination lies in losing oneself in a romantic utopia. Utopia denies God’s economic and faith-based world and His providence over it. It is easy to justify escapism or outrageous conduct to gain personal control. A good character who uses magical means may suggest anti-Christian religious alternatives and a relative morality that makes man the final arbiter of right and wrong. Magical, fairytale-like actions could tempt the weak-minded to see them as potential occult sources of power. I have watched Christian young people lose themselves in fantastic role-playing games. The hippie generation desired to re-form their personal realities; they appropriated Tolkien as well as LSD.<sup>3</sup> Christians must ask: Does the fantastic literary device glorify God and readily encourage seeking Him, or does it steer the heart

into temptation? Does the use of the occult, magic, or superstition in literary devices glorify God, or detract from His glory, purpose, and law? Does C. S. Lewis’s wild Narnian Bacchus glorify God, or does association with this obscene god of the Romans lead us astray? What is a fantastic literary god in light of Scripture?

We may misunderstand literary figures. In Tolkien, though Gandalf may wield magical power and the elves possess a supernatural sentience, the good guys manifestly oppose the bad guys upon Biblical, moral grounds. It makes sense that World War II would figure prominently in Tolkien, as it does in the work of Lewis. Great evil in the form of ultimate and consuming tyranny clearly concerns Tolkien as it did Europe and the whole world at the time of the writing of *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>4</sup> Germany’s success would have destroyed historical Christian liberty in Europe. The prospect loomed fatally and large. Tolkien understood that the present mortal danger stemmed from evil spiritual roots and represented it accordingly.

Tom Bombadil, the source of considerable speculation in *The Lord of the Rings*, appears as a mystery. Tolkien, perhaps coyly, called Tom “pure natural science.”<sup>5</sup> I can further picture Old Tom as the United States from a British point of view. He seems all-powerful and god-like, “here before the river and the trees.” He is complaisantly jolly and full of faith or self-assurance. He possesses great power, yet he does not involve himself in the affairs of the forest. However, when the need arises, he effectively rescues the good guys. Is such a fantastic figure an abuse of Biblical means toward a godly and moral end?

What if Old Tom and characters such as Gandalf represent particular attributes of God, such as Wisdom is personified in the Proverbs? May the likes of Gandalf and Tom Bombadil represent the unseen power and work of God, the heavenly realm seamlessly revealed in the material to clarify the significance of the heavenly? These characters deserve the benefit of the doubt.

We may simplistically reject Tolkien, Lewis, and the European fairy tales. What might we then lose in the rich, effective, thought-provoking clothing of Biblical principles with imaginative life? What of the dangers? It remains the responsibility of literary consumers to interpret, sort, judge, and conclude. Christians must inculcate in our children and in us the capacity for godly wisdom and discernment over the creative product. Life is not simple. Because of these issues, Christians must rigorously sanctify the imagination by the Word of God. Otherwise, the vain imagination will rule.

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## Discernment

Satan is a clever master dissimulator and men are very vulnerable, but he can only corrupt what God made good. May Christians merely enjoy a good, extended fairy tale written for adults without overly scrutinizing and criticizing the text for its story devices? I am not willing to join the crabby naysayers, who use any imperfection as justification to avoid involvement and the responsibility to redeem imaginative literature or any other cultural institution. Neither will I absolutely and uncritically embrace the fallible work of men.

Men speak from fountains of the heart (*Mt. 12:34*). Though a writer may self-consciously intend no lesson or moral, he cannot help but express some theme — the theme of his heart. He speaks what he knows and what he believes. In interpreting a theme, a reader or viewer must understand that his discernment depends upon a sound interpretation of the figure. What does the literary image stand for? Using apparent occult or magical power for good may be confusing. However, to discard Tolkien and Lewis over this issue would trash some of the most engaging stories of good against evil ever written. We should strive to distinguish between the acceptable and the unacceptable in all creative work of men, and hold to the good by faith. Wisdom dictates interpreting promising literature and, in turn, teaching discernment to young, vulnerable minds. Parents must learn to take intellectual dominion and teach their children how to discern good and evil in literature. This is particularly true of purported Christian literature.

Pushing the frontiers of an otherwise godly imagination is dangerous. Danger should prompt discernment and prudence, not timidity, superstition, or fear. Therefore, we should attempt to redeem everything redeemable within our reach by faith, and leave the rest to Providence and better hearts and minds to follow. We must counsel our children and students toward discernment. They ought not to accept everything as good — even from good men. They should know that ideas have consequences and that, as distance grows, even small sighting errors lead to massive target misses. They should always test what they believe to be good or evil with a good conscience. The conscience emerges from intimate acquaintance with Jesus Christ through His Word, intimate fellowship with Him in personal devotion, and the trust that His Spirit will make necessary corrections. Then, all things will work together for the good.

May men master the Word of God and the skills of good fiction. May we learn from the victories,

failures, and questionable accomplishments, all to educate our hearts and minds for new and ever godlier efforts. If anyone is unhappy with our present legacy of Christian literature, may the sons of God in Christ arise to produce excellence in imaginative writing that will glorify Him in all ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1978), 285.

<sup>2</sup> Mary-Elaine Swanson, *The Education of James Madison* (Montgomery, AL: The Hoffman Education Center for the Family, 1992), 285. Madison was deeply influenced by Locke's writings on government.

<sup>3</sup> A humorous example can be found at the U.K. Website, <http://www.adrian.smith.clara.net>, "for all us old flower-children, drop-outs, long-hairs, tree-huggers and hobbit-lovers."

<sup>4</sup> In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis refers to the bombing of London as the reason the children visit Professor Kirke in the country. According to the "Foreword of the Second Edition," Tolkien began *The Lord of the Rings* around 1937, the time of the rise of Hitler.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Hargrove, "Who is Tom Bombadil?" <http://www.cas.unt.edu/~hargrove/bombadil.html>.

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# The Incarnation and Modern Science

By James Nickel

**I**n the twentieth century, God blessed the catholic<sup>3</sup> church with many men; each called into the kingdom for such a time and each performing a unique service for the kingdom. I want to note three men in particular (primarily because of their impact on my life and thinking). Two men are familiar to the readers of this publication, Cornelius Van Til (1895-1987) and Rousas John Rushdoony (1916-2001). I never met Dr. Van Til, but I had the extraordinary privilege of speaking with Rev. Rushdoony on several occasions. Both men strongly embraced historical, orthodox Christianity in its distinctive Reformation thrust. Van Til brought to the plate presuppositional analysis based upon the self-authenticating nature of Scripture and the transcendental argument for the existence of God.

Based upon Van Til's devastating critique of human autonomy, Rushdoony exposed twentieth century Christendom to a full-orbed and comprehensive faith in his application of the whole Word of God to every sphere of life.

## An Assessment of Jaki

The third man may be unknown to some readers of this publication, simply because he is a fully committed Roman Catholic. His name is Stanley L. Jaki (1924-), a Hungarian-born Benedictine priest who holds two Ph.D. degrees (one in systematic theology and the other in nuclear physics). In the past 35 years, he has written close to 60 books/booklets and a multitude of scholarly essays. His area of expertise, which this essay will attempt to expli-

*I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end . . .*

*Axioms, or Laws of Motion – Law 1: Every body perseveres in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed thereon.<sup>2</sup>*

cate, and which we of the Protestant tradition must thoroughly grasp, is the history of science and its relationship to foundational Christian tenets.<sup>4</sup> I first read Jaki in 1986. I have since attempted to read everything he has written (I'm batting about .600 in that regard). I have also had the privilege of talking to the incredibly gracious Dr. Jaki via telephone and letter.

Reading Jaki is pure delight (even when he throws jabs at Protestants<sup>5</sup>). The man is adeptly "at home" with the English language (plus six others). He has a formidable grasp of Roman Catholic theology,<sup>6</sup> science, and philosophy.<sup>7</sup> His reading of history is extensive and his capacity for sustained scholarly work is awe-inspiring.<sup>8</sup> It befits us, as heirs of the Reformed tradition, to be catholic in

our spirit with respect to Jaki. We certainly disagree with his understanding of the true nature of catholicism and personal salvation.<sup>9</sup> We would also disagree with his scorn of Creation Science.<sup>10</sup> *However, we certainly can sit at his feet and learn from his insightful and masterful analysis of the conceptual development of modern science.*

In the modern world, many meanings have been affixed to the word "science." I am taking the meaning of this word as it was understood in the seventeenth century (Newton's time). To Newton and his compatriots, science (or more specifically, physics) meant the study of motion in all of its forms (e.g., motion of the moon, projectile motion, free-fall motion, motion of sound waves, motion of light waves, motion of heat). To simplify matters, the first

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law of motion (also called the law of inertia or the theory of impetus) is the inaugurating conception for the enterprise that we now call modern science.<sup>11</sup>

## Duhem's Medieval "Treasure Hunt"

The importance of Stanley Jaki's historical work is in his calling to our attention the scientific investigations of the French theoretical physicist, Pierre Duhem (1861-1916).<sup>12</sup> In his day, Duhem was *the* world authority on chemical thermodynamics (the study of the *motion* of heat). As part of his study, Duhem sought to understand the historical development of the science of dynamics.<sup>13</sup> He assumed that he would start with the mechanical theories of Archimedes (ca. 287-212 BC) and "long jump" two millennia to the dynamical theories of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). He would have ignored these 1,800 years had it not have been for his study, initiated around 1904, of the immediate antecedents of Galileo. Those predecessors made obscure references to a thirteenth century individual by the name of Jordanus.<sup>14</sup> Jordanus and his school developed a number of significant and "modern" mechanical ideas. One has been called the "axiom of Jordanus." It states that the motive power which can lift a given weight a certain height can lift a weight  $x$  times heavier to  $1/x$  times the height. This is the germ of the modern scientific principle of virtual displacements or virtual velocities.<sup>15</sup>

Duhem's interest was piqued. He began meticulously to ransack medieval manuscripts, most written in a form of Latin shorthand that varied from region to region.<sup>16</sup> He discovered that Jordanus was part of the Sorbonne (founded in 1257), a building attached to the University of Paris, one of the premier medieval universities. And, to his utmost surprise, Duhem discovered an accurate articulation of Newton's first law of motion in two other Sorbonne professors, Jean Buridan (1300-1358) and Nicole Oresme (ca. 1323-1382).<sup>17</sup> Buridan is generally given passing note in the history of philosophy (*e.g.*, Buridan's ass). In these two men, obscure in Duhem's time (and, unfortunately, still significantly obscure in our time), Duhem discovered scientific genius. But, even more unanticipated by Duhem, he discovered that this historical breakthrough was predicated by *a belief in and application of historic Christian creeds.*

## Aristotelian Motion

It was during the 13th and 14th centuries that the Greek scientific corpus, primarily the works of Aristotle (384-322 BC), found its way into the purview of medieval scholastics (via the agency of Arabic scholars). To Aristotle, the universe was uncreated and eternal (time being understood as cyclical in nature<sup>18</sup>). Buridan and his fellow Christian scholars, including Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274),

rejected this thesis as unbiblical and not in accord with Christian tenets, *i.e.*, that God the Father Almighty created the universe "in the beginning" (time being understood as linear in nature<sup>19</sup>). To a Christian, the universe is created and finite. Buridan, possessing keen scientific inquisitiveness, did not put a period at the end of "the universe is created and finite" sentence (as Aquinas did). He considered the answer to the following question, "How, physically, did the motion of the universe start?" He first took a deep look at Aristotle's theory of motion.

Aristotle's theory of motion was lashed to his *a priori* (and deterministic) pantheistic emanationism. According to Aristotle, the universe consisted, recalling the Greek geocentric arrangement, of a series of concentric, crystalline spheres with the Earth at the center. The universe moved because its highest sphere, the sphere of the fixed stars, was in a sort of "contact" with a "divine motor" that Aristotle called the "Unmoved or Prime Mover." As Aristotle stated, it was through eternal contact with this "undefined" Prime Mover that the universe continued in its eternal motion (or rotation). Aristotle also pronounced (again *a priori*) that the celestial spheres reflected perfect motion. To him (and to the rest of his Greek collaborators), the circle is perfection and the heavenly rotations reflect perfect circular motion. Motion on the terrestrial realm, *i.e.*, the Earth, being at the farthest point from the perfect motive power (or emanation) of the Prime Mover was, by its distance from the source of that emanation, *imperfect* (or, in the state of *partial disorder*). No coherent or universal law, therefore, could unite motion celestial with motion terrestrial. Also, the Greeks had a name for their conception of the universe; they called it *monogenes* (the only-begotten).<sup>20</sup>

## Fruitful Reflections

Buridan and Oresme presupposed, based upon Biblical revelation, an *absolute beginning* for physical motion. To them, the universe was *distinct* from its Creator. To assume the contact that Aristotle postulated was, to them, pantheism (*i.e.*, the universe, in its contact with the Prime Mover, was intimately connected to and part of that Source of movement). Buridan then asked, "If the universe is distinct from its Creator, then how do we account for the movements of the celestial orbs?" At this point, Buridan's genius came into play, a genius motivated consciously by his belief in the tenets of the Christian God. He stated that at the moment of creation, God imparted motion to the universe and in that motion He established general influences (ordinances) that governed its continued motion. He said:

When God created the world, He moved each of the celestial orbs as He pleased, and in moving them He impressed in them impetuses which moved them

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without His having to move them any more except by the method of general influence whereby He concurs as a co-agent in all things which take place; ... these impetuses which He impressed in the celestial bodies were not decreased nor corrupted afterward, because there was no resistance which would be corruptive or repressive of that impetus.<sup>21</sup>

Note three momentous and crucial features nested in these few sentences. First, note the equivalence with Newton's first law of motion.<sup>22</sup> Since Newton's first law forms the basis of his second and third laws of motion, then, in Buridan's statement, we have encapsulated before us the very foundation of modern physics.<sup>23</sup> All of us know that modern physics impacts the entirety of modern technological life. But few of us know, and thanks to Duhem and Jaki, we no longer have any excuse for not knowing, the medieval and Christian basis for such modernity.

Second, Buridan's statement engenders the consideration of how the "general influence of God whereby He concurs as a co-agent in all things which take place" works out in practice. In other words, Buridan is stating that the universe is coherent and that its law-like interactions can be studied and discovered. God's created order acts in a consistent fashion, so consistent that man can put "mathematical equations" to it. It is this consistency that serves as a basic presupposition (and, I might add, this presupposition is Christian in nature) for all research scientists.

Consistency in the interactions of God's created order due to His faithful rule leads us to the third point. We can *quantify* these motions (that is just what Oresme, Buridan's successor, attempted to do).<sup>24</sup> In Oresme, we find the notion of a mathematical function (*e.g.*, heat vs. time, distance an object falls vs. time).<sup>25</sup> It is important to also note that another medieval invention, the mechanical clock, providentially came onto the scene simultaneously with Buridan and Oresme.<sup>26</sup> The mechanical clock combined with Oresme's seminal functional concepts enabled scientists to "time" *motion* activities that no one had ever thought of timing before. The medieval mechanical clock also provided the quantitative precision needed for the birth and growth of modern science. The theory of impetus combined with mathematical functions provided the foundation for one of the most important mathematical formulations ever and Newton played a key role in its initial articulation.<sup>27</sup> I am speaking of the differential and integral calculus, *i.e.*, the "mathematics of motion" that serves as the rigging of the ship of science.<sup>28</sup>

## The "Sacred" Cliché

This medieval presentiment of Newton's first law of motion, founded upon Christian creeds and unearthed initially by Duhem a century ago, rings hollow in the modern world of academe and science.<sup>29</sup> This vacuousness should not come as a surprise. The French

Enlightenment, led by the French philosopher François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778), launched salvo after salvo of propaganda, each burst exploding into the myth that science and revealed religion (*i.e.*, the Christian Faith) were in an irreconcilable conflict.<sup>30</sup> Needless to say, Duhem, a French Roman Catholic, upset the cart and the horse of this hallowed cliché. Duhem's exposé is why, at the behest of certain elements of the French government, the last five volumes of his *Système du monde* were shelved.<sup>31</sup> It was not until the early 1950s, some 38 years after Duhem's death, that these manuscripts saw the light of day, owing to the incredibly heroic persistence of Duhem's daughter, Hélène.<sup>32</sup>

## False Starts

Duhem showed that physical science could not be contrary to the Christian Faith *because it owed its very birth to that Faith*. As Jaki has so elegantly revealed, science was stillborn in every ancient culture.<sup>33</sup> In spite of some promising starts, science failed to emerge. For example, consider the decimal system (base 10) of numeration, a Hindu invention, and Euclidean Geometry, the glory of Greek deductive genius. Yet, neither was science; neither gave a handle to dealing with things in motion, the very crux of modern science. All these stillbirths — whether Indian, Babylonian, Mayan, Egyptian, Chinese, or Greek — can be traced to a faulty view of the universe. Each of these cultures embraced an organismic view of the cosmos, a view that fathomed all things in pantheistic terms as an eternal begetting (Greek: *monogenes*) of a divine absolute or *logos* (Greek for "reason"), starting from the celestial realm and emanating into the "partial disorder" of the terrestrial.<sup>34</sup>

There was one culture that got a handle on dealing with things in motion and that culture embraced and believed in a babe born in Bethlehem. This babe, according to Christian creeds, was the only-begotten (Greek: *monogenes*) Son of God (*Jn. 1:18*). This babe was also the *Logos* of God (*Jn. 1:1*), a *Logos* that was God manifested in the flesh (*Jn. 1:14*). Any Greek philosopher, reading these words of the Apostle John, would not have missed this affront to pantheistic emanationism.

This challenge was based upon the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, the *Logos*, revealed in Scripture and in Christian creeds as fully God (very God of very God) and fully man (incarnate of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary). The theological ramifications of the revelation of God in Christ were hammered out initially by the early councils of the church.<sup>35</sup> The preciseness of these statements, in time, had far-reaching consequences.

## Impact of the Incarnation

Rome eventually fell and the Christian West began its pioneering struggles. The followers of Christ eventually reconstructed a barbarian world, making it a Christian civilization (although with faults). It was when this Christian civilization gained full access to

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the Greek philosophical and scientific corpus that the impact of Christ on science began to unfold.

The universe to the Christian West was a Christ-ruled universe. It was in no way an “emanation from a divine motor.” It was free from vague organismic or animistic influences (the source of a multitude of disorderly processes). This universe was ordered in accord with God’s faithful decrees (*Job 38:33; Ps. 148:1-6; Jer. 31:35-36*). Only in this universe could motion be understood properly; *i.e.*, the conservation of momentum, and where free fall was truly free and not governed by Aristotle’s desire-driven machinations.<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, the law of inertial motion was first formulated in reference to the Biblical God, the Creator of that motion, who, in the beginning, made all things in and through Christ (*Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16*).

The createdness of all things in and through a person, the *Logos* of God, proved to be a certain assurance that all things cohere in their Creator (*Col. 1:17*). All His works reflect a coherent wisdom because the *Logos* of God is also the Wisdom of God (*Pr. 8:12-36; 1 Cor. 1:24; Col. 2:3*). Athanasius (ca. 293-373), who stood *contra mundum* (against the world) of Arian heresy (that purported Christ as not being fully God), recognized the significance of a fully rational and wise God creating a fully rational and good (interconnected and interacting) creation.<sup>37</sup> After citing John 1:1, Athanasius described the universe as a divine hymn:

*...so also the Wisdom of God, handling the universe as a lyre; . . . in combining parts into wholes . . . produces well and fittingly, as the result, the unity of the universe and of its order . . . and He produces as the result a marvelous and truly divine harmony.*<sup>38</sup>

The divine harmony of Athanasius differs antithetically (at the root level) with the Pythagorean “harmony of the spheres.” To Pythagoras (ca. 582-ca. 500 BC) and the rest of the pantheon of Greek philosophers, this harmony was not the reflection of a personal, rational Creator revealed in the flesh as the only-begotten Son of God. Although Athanasius was *contra mundum* (against the world of error), he was *pro universo* (for the universe). He was *pro universo* because Christ holds the universe together in His wisdom and by His power. It is this revelation of Christ, the Incarnate Christ, that is the *only* valid ground for a totally rational and harmonious universe, an orchestral hymn linking the realm of the celestial with the realm of the terrestrial. Contra Aristotle, who denied that any coherent law could unite these two realms, the Christian West, founded upon the reality of the Incarnation of Christ, could embrace such a union. And it eventually did in the person of Isaac Newton for he breathed deeply of such a Christian consensus, in spite of his own latent Arianism, in an English scientific atmosphere commanded by Puritan theology. This “air of truth” provided the foundation

for Newton’s confidence that he could connect the falling of an apple with the motion of the moon. He made this connection mathematically in his inverse-square law,<sup>39</sup> better known as the law of *universal* gravitation (one law connecting two diverse realms, motion celestial with motion terrestrial).

This science of motion could not be born until the babe born in Bethlehem made His impact, until His light of truth dispelled the darkness of error. This Christ, in the fullest sense of the term, is truly the *Savior* of science.

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<sup>1</sup>The commencement of the so-called “Nicene Creed” (ca. 374). These declarations probably came from the writings of Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem from 350 to 386, with the addition of clauses from the Creed of Nicaea. The Council of Chalcedon approved this creed in 451 as representing the creed of the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

<sup>2</sup>Isaac Newton’s (1642-1727) rendering of his “first law of motion.” From Isaac Newton, *The Principia*, trans. Andrew Motte (Amherst: Prometheus Books, [1687, 1848] 1995), 19.

<sup>3</sup>By catholic, I mean universal in the sense of (1) the universality of Christ’s reign over every square inch of the creation, whether visible or invisible and (2) the universality of His church, consisting of His blood-bought people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and age saved by His sovereign grace (irrespective of outward structure or form).

<sup>4</sup>I summarize Jaki’s arguments in the chapter “The Birth That Saved Science” in *The Savior of Science* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 49-87.

<sup>5</sup>One jab that Jaki threw at me was that “Protestants do not think.” I responded, “Yes, in the majority of cases, that is true.” Jaki continued, “If Protestants would think, then they would become Catholics.” But, thinking Protestants are already catholics (in the sense that I defined the word in footnote 3). Of course, that statement would infuriate Jaki based upon *his* definition of catholic.

<sup>6</sup>To Jaki, Christian theology *is* Roman Catholic theology. To him, the Reformers erred greatly when they replaced the “Pope with the Bible.” In denying the self-authenticating nature of Scripture, Jaki readily submits the interpretation of Scripture to the fallible and fixed canons of the Holy See. I’m sure that Jaki would vehemently disagree with me on this assessment; *i.e.*, that the Holy See is fallible *just like the rest of us*. Only Christ and His Word are infallible in the true sense of the meaning of infallibility.

<sup>7</sup>Although, I doubt he has read Van Til (based upon his “silent response” to my request that he make the attempt).

<sup>8</sup>In this respect, the priestly call befits Jaki. One cannot be married with children and accomplish what he has accomplished in his life of seven decades plus seven years and counting.

<sup>9</sup>Having read his *A Mind's Matter: An Intellectual Autobiography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), I am convinced that Jaki embraces the dogma that personal salvation can *only* be found through the channels of grace that reside in Roman Catholicism. In the eternal joys of the consummate New Jerusalem, one of God's angels will likely command us to stop the joyous ruckus as we approach the Roman Catholic sector (of course, there will be no such sectors in the eternal state) saying, “Shh, be quiet, they think they are the only ones here.” After reading Jaki's autobiography, though, to say that he does not know the “joy of God's gracious salvation” would be a lie.

<sup>10</sup>In short, Jaki has *nothing good* to say about Creation Science. To refute his reasons for such bias is beyond the scope of this essay.

<sup>11</sup>See the chapter “The Historical Importance of a Theory of Impetus” in Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), 1-16.

<sup>12</sup>His magnum opus is the ten-volume (5,000-page) work *Le Système du monde: Histoire Des Doctrines Cosmologiques* (Paris: Librairie Scientifique A. Hermann et fils, 1913-1959). The abridgement of this work in English is *Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds*, ed. and trans. Roger Ariew (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). See also *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*, trans. Philip P. Weiner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1954, 1982] 1991). For his biography, see Stanley L. Jaki, *Uneasy Genius: The Life and Work of Pierre Duhem* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984) or Stanley L. Jaki, *Scientist and Catholic: Pierre Duhem* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1991).

<sup>13</sup>Duhem's main history teacher in his university days was Louis Cons, an advocate of Auguste Comte's (1798-1857) positivism. The only positive prescript of positivism is its emphasis on the study of history; *i.e.*, the necessary precondition of a true comprehension of any subject is the thorough study of its history. We should be grateful that Duhem learned this lesson well.

<sup>14</sup>We are not sure as to the real identity of this person. We know that someone by the name of Jordanus Saxo (d. 1237), a second master-general of the Order of Preachers (*i.e.*, Dominicans), founded the school of Jordanus Nemorarius. So, Jordanus may represent a “school” of thought.

<sup>15</sup>See Alistair C. Crombie, *The History of Science: From Augustine to Galileo* (New York: Dover Publications, [1959, 1970, 1979] 1995), 1:126-127.

<sup>16</sup>In about six years, as a result of his unprecedented and almost superhuman research, Duhem filled approximately 120 notebooks at 200 pages each (*i.e.*, 24,000 pages) with excerpts from almost one hundred manuscripts. Remember that he did this without the assistance of central library catalogues, Xerox machines,

microfilms, typewriter, or ballpoint pen. Worldwide access to computer relational databases was not on anyone's radar yet (neither was radar). All he had was an ink well, a quill (or maybe fountain) pen, paper, and dogged persistence.

<sup>17</sup>In 1985, I asked Rousas J. Rushdoony this question, “Where do I go to find out what was happening in science and mathematics in the medieval era?” Without pausing to think, Rushdoony replied, “Read Oresme, Nicole Oresme.”

<sup>18</sup>Time is in an “infinite loop” where the code of history continuously repeats itself. No long-term commitment to progress can be established with this treadmill (we are running but going nowhere) view of history.

<sup>19</sup>Time is “sequential” where the code of history is ordained in terms of God's eternal decrees. The sequential nature of time is inherent in the Christian creeds. They start from creation, progress to the Incarnation, declare the Christ as the Lord and Judge of history (and His holy congregation operative in that history), and end with the Second Advent, the general resurrection, and the eternal state. Long-term commitment to growth and development can be established with this structured (we are walking toward a goal) view of history.

<sup>20</sup>See some examples in Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vol. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76) under “monogenes.”

<sup>21</sup>Cited in Marshall Clagett, *The Science of Mechanics in the Middle Ages* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959), 536.

<sup>22</sup>Newton, like most other scientists of the seventeenth century, the “Century of Genius” according to the analysis of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), ignored the scientific “giants” of the medieval era, contra to Newton's mantra that he “stood on the shoulders of giants.” Newton's ignorance of these giants is partly due to the anti-medieval thrust of the Renaissance, a thrust that popularized a misguided notion that medieval times were nothing but the “dark ages” of obscurantism. Newton actually “copied” this law (without noting any credit) from the writings of the French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes learned of Buridan's ideas, if not of Buridan by name, by way of the traditions taught to him during his student years at the Jesuit College in La Flèche. At this school, Descartes' teachers taught from a tradition cultivated especially at Salamanca. Salamanca, in turn, was indebted to the fourteenth century Sorbonne.

<sup>23</sup>By modern physics, I include (1) the celestial mechanics of Albert Einstein (1879-1955) and (2) the atomic (*i.e.*, quantum) mechanics of Max Planck (1858-1947). I do not embrace Einstein's theology (he borders on pantheism) or the logical equivocation (known as the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics) of Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976). Please note, though, without Newton's laws of motion (what is now considered to be the foundation of classical physics), *both these evolvments could not have been initiated*. And, without Buridan's Christian conceptual foundation, *Newton's work could not get the “jump start” it needed*.

<sup>24</sup>Quantification was certainly in the medieval “air” and Oresme breathed deeply from this ambient atmosphere. The Latin phrase “God has arranged everything accord-

ing to measure, number, and weight” (from Wisdom of Solomon 11:20-21) was the most often quoted and alluded to phrase in Medieval Latin texts. See Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. W. R. Trask (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), 504. See also Ivor Grattan-Guinness, *The Rainbow of Mathematics: A History of the Mathematical Sciences* (New York: W. W. Norton, [1997] 2000), 127 and Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>25</sup>Oresme also contemplated, with remarkable composure, an innovative concept for those times; *i.e.*, the prospect of the Earth’s rotation.

<sup>26</sup>The motivation for this invention may have come from the medieval monasteries where a monk had to awaken in the middle of the night to call his brothers for nightly prayers (*Ps. 119:62, 147-148*). The sundial (that only works during the day) and water clock (that does not work in freezing temperatures) could not be relied upon for the necessary precision. The solution was the invention of a “verge and foliat” mechanical clock that uses a mutual feedback mechanism, a system copied in countless modern instruments. See Donald Cardwell, *Wheels, Clocks, and Rockets: A History of Technology* (New York: W. W. Norton, [1995] 2001), 20-48.

<sup>27</sup>See the chapter entitled “Medieval Contributions” in Carl B. Boyer, *The History of the Calculus and Its Conceptual Development* (New York: Dover Publications, [1949] 1959), 61-95.

<sup>28</sup>Differential calculus is the mathematics of “motion at an instant of time.” The integral calculus determines the area under a curve. The two procedures are inverses of each other as the Fundamental Theorem of the Calculus reveals.

<sup>29</sup>Even though Duhem’s work is well known to the scholarly public (little of his work is known beyond this public), most scholars find unpalatable Duhem’s linking of the theory of impetus to Christian and medieval origins. In spite of his opposition to Duhem’s thesis, French science historian Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964) still recognized Duhem’s work as a rich and indispensable source of information. In general, school science textbooks fail miserably to account for the medieval origin of the law of inertia. These texts present this law as a waiter presents dinner at a restaurant. True education is not just learning the facts or definitions (the *what*), but also the *why*, the *who*, the *how*, and the *where*. Where did the food come from? How was this food prepared? Who is the chef? Why did he make it this way? That the mainstream physics textbooks just present the “facts” is to be expected. That so-called Christian physics textbooks do the same is *inexcusable*.

<sup>30</sup>By the late nineteenth century, before Duhem’s discoveries, this myth had become undisputed fact. See John William Draper (1811-1882), *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (New York: D. Appleton, 1875) and Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918), *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* (New York: Dover Publications, [1896] 1960). White founded Cornell University.

<sup>31</sup>Volumes 6-10 contain Duhem’s presentation and interpretation of Buridan’s writings.

<sup>32</sup>For this fascinating story, see Stanley L. Jaki, *Reluctant Heroine: The Life and Work of Hélène Dubem* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1992).

<sup>33</sup>See Jaki’s *magnum opus*, *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986).

<sup>34</sup>See the chapter “The World as an Organism” in Stanley L. Jaki, *The Relevance of Physics* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, [1966, 1970] 1992), 3-51.

<sup>35</sup>See Rousas J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church* (Fairfax: Thoburn Press, [1968] 1978).

<sup>36</sup>Aristotle’s doctrine of inertia was a doctrine of rest (statics, not dynamics, was foundational). To Aristotle, terrestrial motion was not natural, but violent. Why? It contradicted the ordinary tendency (or desire) of a body to move to what was regarded as its natural place (*i.e.*, its vital part or place of rest). To account for motion, Aristotle asserted that a body in motion would keep moving only as long as a mover (emanations from the “divine motor”) was actually in contact with it, imparting motion to it continuously. For example, the continual movement of a projectile is explained by the commotion in the air caused by its initial movement — the air being pushed and compressed in front had to rush round behind (to prevent a vacuum that, according to Aristotle, cannot take place). Also, according to Aristotle, the heavier an object weighed, the more “desire” it had for its “natural place.” That is why, when a ten-pound ball and a one-pound ball are released from a given height at the same time, the ten-pound ball, moving more jubilantly to its natural place, hits the ground before the one-pound ball. One *a posteriori* experiment could have laid to rest this languorous physics. To Aristotle, because the terrestrial realm was rather crude (being so far from the “divine motor”), one had to rely upon *a priori* abstract theory *alone* to explain motion. Aristotle’s misunderstanding of the nature of the universe (= *monogenes*) imprisoned him in a blind alley that barred him from getting a viable handle on dealing with things in motion.

<sup>37</sup>Athanasius recognized that if the errors of Arianism were not nipped in the bud, Christianity would devolve into Greek pantheistic emanationism.

<sup>38</sup>Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* (Albany, OR: Sage Digital Library, 1996), 42. See 39-41 for citational context.

<sup>39</sup>Written mathematically as where  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  represent the mass of two objects,  $D$  is the distance between these objects,  $G$  is a gravitational constant, and  $F$  is the force of gravitational pull between the two objects. If  $m_1 =$  your mass and  $m_2 =$  the mass of the Earth, then  $F =$  your weight (*i.e.*, the measure of the gravitational pull between you and the Earth).

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# Celebration and Rejoicing: A “Consumption Tax” That Christians Can Live With!

*By Craig R. Dumont, Sr.*

**A**s we approach the holiday season, among many devout Christians there is an almost spontaneous outburst of joy because of what this time represents: blessings derived from God Himself (Thanksgiving), the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Christmas), and the fact that all time revolves around Him (New Years Day, marking “The Year of our Lord”). We experience the euphoria that comes from feasting with family, singing joyful and reverent Christmas carols, and anticipating the delight and pleasure of giving gifts to close friends and family members. The opportunity to gather as a family to throw a celebration banquet where we eat and drink and make merry is embraced with vigorous gladness.

But even as we follow through with our celebrations and gift buying and giving there is a growing tendency to feel guilty about doing so. While this rejoicing seems to be an irrepressible part of man, especially the Christian, there are those who call for the repression of joy and celebration, the mutation or outright elimination of rejoicing. Specifically, we hear increasing calls for less “consumerism” or consumption. After all, the reasoning goes, to spend wealth on ourselves is not the “Christian” thing to do when there are so many hurting and needy people in the world. Plus, how can we sanction and sanctify, even during Christmas — or maybe especially during Christmas — consuming limited resources for such selfish and trivial reasons?

If you listen to some of our most visible and powerful leaders today you would think that any private and personal use of wealth or any public display of indulging in consuming a portion of that wealth is a great sin against humanity and the environment. Many well-meaning Christians, as well as ungodly pagans, are stepping up the campaign to create a utopian world where no one rejoices or celebrates until all poverty is alleviated, wealth and prosperity is equally distributed, and the earth returns to a supposedly pristine wholeness in which it’s resources remain unmolested and unexploited.

So what is a Christian to do? To whom is he to listen? Of course the answer to those questions must be that he turns to the Bible and listens to what God has declared is righteous and good. And it turns out that God wants His people to be a joyful and rejoicing

group, *and at proper times*, conspicuous consumers! In fact, He flat out commands rejoicing, consuming, and feasting before Him in order to please Him.

## The Rejoicing Tithe

To find the basis for this principle of rejoicing we need to start in Deuteronomy 14-16, which outlines several tithes (yes, several; there are three tithes that God requires, but we’ll cover that later), one of which is the rejoicing tithe.

Here are some highlights from Deuteronomy:

*You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the Lord your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the Lord your God has blessed you, then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses. And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or strong drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household. (Dt. 14:22-26)*

*All the firstborn males that come from your herd and your flock you shall sanctify to the Lord your God; you shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. You and your household shall eat it before the Lord your God year by year in the place which the Lord chooses. (Dt.15:19-20)*

*You shall rejoice before the Lord your God . . . And you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall be careful to observe these statutes. You shall observe the Feast of Tabernacles*

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*seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. And you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant and the Levite, the stranger and the fatherless and the widow, who are within your gates. (Dt.16:11-14)*

*Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the Lord your God in the place which the Lord chooses, because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you surely rejoice. (Dt. 16:15)*

## Conspicuous Consumption

Now, let's not miss a crucial command that establishes the rejoicing principle: God commands His people to "sanctify to the Lord your God" all the firstborn males from the herd and flock. In other words, set it aside for God. But what does God want it used for? He wants it used for the man or family that set it aside for God. God proclaims that it is a sacrifice to Him when He is obeyed and it is consumed. Now remember, this is not a small thing, but a full tithe each year. To put this in perspective, if you earn \$50,000 per year, this rejoicing tithe would amount to \$5,000. Can you imagine throwing a \$5,000 party? Now that's conspicuous consumption!

As Edward A. Powell, coauthor of *Tithing & Dominion* so aptly puts it, the tither:

*... and his household, plus the local Levite, stranger, and poor were to use this Tithe for rejoicing before the Lord (Deut. 16:13-15). The purpose of this rejoicing was "because the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands" (vs. 15), to bring to remembrance the deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt (Lev. 23:33-44), and to insure that "thou mayest learn to fear the Lord thy God always." (Deut. 14:23)*

*The emphasis of this Tithe is upon rejoicing. The passages in Scripture dealing with this [tithe] (Ex. 23:14-19; Lev. 23:33-44; Deut. 12:5-28; 14:22-27; 15:19-23; 16:13-15) required that it be used by the Israelites to praise the Lord with feasting and rejoicing. The Israelites were commanded by God to rejoice. They were given no option or choice in the matter. This [tithe] was God's money and He commanded that it be used solely for rejoicing before Him. "Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God" (Deut. 12:12). "Thou shalt eat . . . before the Lord thy God, and thou shalt rejoice" (14:26). "Thou shalt rejoice in thy feast" (16:14). This Tithe was not a levitical or poor [tithe]. It was a [tithe] levied by God for the sole purpose of impressing upon the hearts and minds of all Israel the requirement that they were to be joyful.*

Now it's important for us to follow through on this principle that God has established and Powell does just that. He continues:

*In order to understand this legal requirement for joy, we must examine the provisions of this [tithe] in the light of its central theme of rejoicing. This [tithe] was not paid to any central authority, institution or organization. It was to be retained and used by the [tithe] payer. He was the steward of this Tithe of the Lord, and he could use it for "whatever thy soul lusteth after" (Deut. 14:26). The only restriction upon his use of these funds for his enjoyment was that they could not be used for violating the Word of God. For this reason, he could use it "for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth" (vs. 26).*

This is an incredibly powerful statement made by God about the life of His people. His people were to *rejoice* and *consume* for at least three reasons. It was to acknowledge that God had been the source of all their *past* prosperity, indeed, their entire livelihood. They could not feast and rejoice if they had nothing. This rejoicing tithe came out of each person's increase, so while they were rejoicing they were worshipping by offering up thanksgiving to the Lord.

Please understand a very important aspect of this principle. It must be done as worship and thanksgiving to the Lord if it is to be acceptable. Every act of obedience that brings an explicit blessing also means that disobedience brings a curse. Jesus tells us about the rich man who hoarded and consumed out of personal lust rather than thanksgiving and faith. Luke 12:16-21 says:

*The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?"*

*So he said, "I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?"*

*So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*

Was there anything wrong with having barns overflowing? Absolutely not. In fact, it's something to be anticipated by those who obey God as He Himself promises in Malachi 3:10. "'Try Me now in this,' says the Lord of Hosts, 'If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that *there will not be room enough to receive it.*'" The rich man wasn't condemned because he was rich or because he had overflowing barns. The curse came because

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the rich man didn't wish to acknowledge God in thanksgiving or in the tithes, including the rejoicing tithe. He was also found to be a greedy and slothful steward, because while he had been called upon to use a *portion* of our wealth as a rejoicing tithe for our own pleasure, *this man had aspirations on using it all for his pleasure!* He was planning on robbing God! Jesus tells us he laid "up treasure for himself, and [was] not rich toward God." He had conceived robbery and was ungrateful to God and was cursed with a curse.

## The God of the Future

Possibly the most important reason for rejoicing and consuming was to show a faith in God for the future: "because the Lord thy God *shall bless thee* in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands." They were not to fear shortages and think in terms of limitation of resources, for they were serving the Lord God who "gave them the power to get wealth." They were to rejoice with the expectation that they would be even more prosperous in the days to come. The future of the believer was not to be feared, but to be eagerly anticipated. The future, because it was ordered and prepared by God, was going to be even greater in terms of resources and wealth. To hoard with fear was to deny that God's Word was true.

In fact, this faith concerning the future is uniquely Christian. The world says "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Their consumption becomes a sacrament of death to the unbeliever as he doubts the God of the future and "he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin." No wonder the Al Gores of the world are trying to manipulate people through guilt. It's because they truly feel the weight of sin every time they put food in their mouth.

The Christian, however, is filled with faith and unshakable confidence in God and expects future victory and blessings. He is serving Jehovah-Elohim; the Eternal Creator, and Jehovah-Jireh; the Lord will provide. The Christian comes with the faith that declares that God is a God of His Word, "for without faith it is impossible to please Him," and he comes before the Lord eating, drinking and rejoicing for he believes "that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Rejoicing and consuming were also to impress upon the people of God that they served a God in whom they could and should rejoice in continually. They were to be happy and content, filled with peace that passes all understanding and full of joy unspeakable, full of glory. In other words, they were to be a people who looked forward to times of rejoicing and refreshing. There would be times of solemn assemblies when gross sin and iniquity called for it, but by and large, the normal life of those who served God was not one of self-deprivation, but on the contrary, one of godly consumption flowing from the prosperity He gave His covenant people. Why? Because the Israelites were once

slaves in Egypt, but now they were free. God had redeemed them and given them liberty, abundance and salvation. Christians, too, were once slaves to sin, bound up by the devil, the world, and the flesh, facing nothing but death and destruction, but are now set free in Jesus Christ, and promised life, life more abundant! If that doesn't call for feasting and celebrating I don't know what does. We should take many opportunities to remember the work of Christ on the cross and, in fact, we do this in principle each time we partake at the Lord's Table. We rejoice because we're at peace with God and have escaped His wrath through the atoning work of Christ and we know there is no shortage of grace and provision for every area of our life, whether yesterday, today, or tomorrow.

Understanding this principle of the rejoicing tithe is expressed at times such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years Day, and Easter. It is also lived out in family vacations and in personal celebrations with our families such as birthdays and anniversaries, and even hosting friends and families in our homes. It is manifested in company picnics and parties and in church dinners.

The world thinks in terms of shortages, limitations, and fear of the future, so to use precious resources for personal pleasure and rejoicing is foolishness. Unfortunately, even some within Christian circles speak piously about self-deprivation and personal sacrifices that borders on anti-Christian Platonic dualism (the radical separation of the spirit realm from the material realm with the spirit being "good" and material things "bad"). But thanks be to God that all things are counted good and sanctified through Jesus Christ to those who place their faith and confidence in Him. We'll be called on to help the poor in God's time. We're called on to support the church on a regular basis. But we're also commanded to use a portion of our increase to *rejoice before the Lord*. So go ahead and set out an extravagant spread of food and wine and be a generous host of that party you want to throw! Celebrate without guilt or apprehension. "Spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or strong drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household." May God bless you richly in your celebration.

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# The Lord of the Rings: A Good Story

*By Greg Uttinger*



**T**housand years from now, literary critics will likely recognize J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* as the only English language classic to emerge from the twentieth century. Fragments of Hemingway and Faulkner may survive in literature texts, and T. S. Eliot will be a must for those who wish to study the mindset of the age. C. S. Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* will probably endure as a devotional classic, and children will continue to read the *Narnia* series, though perhaps in somewhat edited versions.<sup>1</sup> But critics, scholars, and children will still read *The Lord of the Rings* simply because it's a good story. And the words "good story" need some explanation.

## Of Stories and Story-Telling

Before the world began, the Persons of the Trinity communicated to one another the nature of the history They would create (cf. *Tit. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 13:8*). This is where story-telling began. But God carried the art further. Within history God revealed Himself to His people in a book that contains the heart of His story and many subsidiary stories as well. With the exception of a few parables and allegories, these stories are true — that is, they accurately describe real events within history — but they are stories nonetheless.

Man is the image of God. He necessarily creates stories and enjoys them. Because he is fallen, he does not always tell stories well. He may fail to follow God's pattern for what stories must be and fail in technique and effectiveness; or he may communicate a theme, a message, a worldview, that simply is not true.

Failure in technique can generally be measured by audience response. If a writer's audience reaches the end of the story and says, "So?", the author has probably written a poor story or failed to write a story at all. Like God's archetypal story of sin and redemption, every human story must function in terms of character, conflict, and plot. Plot begins in conflict, works its way by means of complication through suspense and tension, and arrives eventually at climax and resolution. The author who fails to observe this pattern may give us a charming narrative, but he has not given us a story, let alone a good one.<sup>2</sup> And no amount of Christian jargon or devotional trappings will alter that fact.

On the other hand, it is possible for a writer to tell us a technically good story and at the same time to tell us lies. The problem is not that the story is fiction, or even fantasy; the problem lies in the message or worldview the story communicates. We need to be clear about this.

## Fiction and Fantasy

God does not forbid us to write fiction or fantasy. Fiction uses God's universe as a setting, but introduces situations and events that are not real. That is, ordinary fiction portrays as real certain things that God has not ordained or brought to pass. But the fiction writer is not lying, at least in these inventions, because he does not claim to be telling us the truth.

Fantasy does fiction one better. It radically alters history and creation and gives us a world or a history very unlike the one God has actually made. The fantasy writer, to use Tolkien's word, becomes a "sub-creator." He invents new civilizations, new timelines, new races, and even new universes. And while he may easily do this for very wrong reasons, his act of sub-creating is not itself evil.

Proof? In Judges 9:7-15, Jotham, the son of Gideon, tells a story: the trees set about to anoint a king. The trees in this story talk, have a sense of calling, and recognize God as God. The story is fantastic. Trees don't really talk, and certainly care nothing for politics. But the story tells the truth about human nature, human politics, and God's overriding sovereignty. While we are not told that Jotham spoke by divine inspiration, we are told that God honored his curse, which was framed in terms of this story (*Jud. 9:57*).

God grants the fantasy writer great freedom, then. The writer may grant intelligence to non-human creatures; he may invent histories that never happened; he may even (in some measure) involve God Himself in the story without blasphemy. This is what we mean by sub-creation. C. S. Lewis coined the word "supposal." Suppose Venus were a second Eden. Suppose there was another world where Christ incarnated Himself as a talking Lion. Or put more generally, suppose God had done things differently. What if trees talked? Or what if man shared Middle Earth with other rational beings? What if hobbits really did live in holes in the ground?

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But in order to make such supposals fruitful, some things may not change. Divine morality and human nature must be constants, or the story will not touch us. This brings us back to the issue of worldview.

## Worldviews in Literature

Every writer has a worldview, a world-and-life philosophy. Even when an author does not mean to give his story a moral or a message, he cannot help expressing his worldview in some measure. The longer and more involved his story, the more clearly his worldview will come through. The Christian author writes from a Biblical worldview; at least, he should. Even when he supposes a radically different world, he should not suppose a radically different God.<sup>3</sup> His stories should reflect the true God and His ways with men. This does not mean that the Christian writer has to show us all of Christian theology; Jotham didn't. It does mean that his stories should be consistent with the holiness and integrity of God.

"Good story," then, can mean either a technically good story, one that is told well according to God's own standards of story-telling; or it can mean a story that tells us truth very clearly and powerfully. On both counts, *The Lord of the Rings* scores well.

## The Lord of the Rings as Story

As far as technique is concerned, *The Lord of the Rings* is a most excellent story. Tolkien is a master of words, and his adherence to the Biblical pattern has led some to call *The Lord of the Rings* a Christian allegory. They are mistaken; but the mistake is a natural one. The story begins in the *Silmarillion* with the self-revelation of God, His creation of the universe, and the fall of Melkor, a powerful angel. In *The Lord of the Rings*, we see the temporal salvation of Middle Earth worked out by three Christ-like heroes, Gandalf, Aragorn, and Frodo, each of whom passes through death or hell and returns to glory. Furthermore, Biblical images and allusions are woven into the warp and woof of the text. As an arbitrary example, consider this description of Aragorn in the Houses of Healing:

*Then taking two leaves, he laid them on his hands and breathed on them, and then he crushed them, and straightway a living freshness filled the room, as if the air itself awoke and tingled, sparkling with joy.*<sup>4</sup>

"The hands of the king are the hands of a healer."<sup>5</sup> Here are echoes of Genesis, the Holy Place in the Tabernacle, the Song of Songs, and the resurrected Christ breathing on His disciples. Clearly, Tolkien's mind was saturated with the images and language of Scripture.

But the use of Biblical patterns and images does not guarantee a Biblical message. For example, the late science-fiction series *Babylon 5* borrowed heavily from Scripture and Tolkien, and even presented Christian

clergymen in a favorable light. But in the end, its worldview lay somewhere between Hegel and New Age mysticism. We must ask, what does *The Lord of the Rings* tell us about God and His ways with men?

## God and Man in *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien names God *Ilúvatar*, the All-Father, and *Eru*, the One. Ilúvatar is the self-existent, personal Creator of the universe. He may seem to some an aloof god of the Unitarian sort, but Tolkien has said that the Secret Fire, which was "with Ilúvatar," is, in fact, the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> And Ilúvatar sent the Secret Fire, the Flame Imperishable, to burn at the heart of the world.<sup>7</sup> Middle Earth is a theistic world in the Trinitarian sense. God is immanent and immediately involved with His creation. He is sovereign in His eternal decree and His providence.

Gandalf makes this very plain from the beginning. In telling Frodo about Bilbo's discovery of the Ring, he says, "Behind that there was something else at work beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and *not* by its owner. In which case you were also *meant* to have it."<sup>8</sup>

In a similar vein, Elrond tells the members of the Council:

*That is the purpose for which you are called hither. Called, I say, though I have not called you to me, strangers from distant lands. You have come and are here met, in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem. Yet it is not so. Believe rather that it is ordered that we who sit here, and none other, must now find counsel for the perils of the world.*<sup>9</sup>

The *Silmarillion* gives us an even clearer testimony; for Ilúvatar, speaking of the celestial music that forecasts the future of the world, says this:

*And thou, Melkor, shalt see that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can any alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove but mine instrument in the devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined.*<sup>10</sup>

But this divine sovereignty does not do away with human responsibility or cause and effect within history. Each man, each elf, each hobbit, is responsible to discern good from evil, and to choose the good. For good and evil are absolutes in Middle Earth. Aragorn tells us, "Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house."<sup>11</sup>

Choices matter. Bilbo's decision to spare Gollum, a decision born of pity, had profound effects, as did Frodo's decision to take up the Ring. But choice is not

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always easy. Evil may come disguised as the opportunity to do great good (the Ring). It may present itself as an angel of light (Saruman). Or it may threaten brutal and horrific violence (Sauron). The good man may well feel the force of these temptations, but in the end he will not give in to them.

For Tolkien, then, the true hero is the man (or hobbit) who shuns the ease of evil and, out of selfless love, lays down his life for his friends . . . or for his world. There is no existentialism here, but much of absolutes, much of integrity, and much of self-sacrifice.

## Magic in Tolkien

The worldview of *The Lord of the Rings* is overwhelmingly Christian. But no book is without its faults, and some have pointed to Tolkien's use of magic and the occult as a fatal one. Given the Biblical prohibitions against sorcery, should we really look up to heroes who use magic?

Magic, though, is an ambiguous word. Daniel was master of the magicians (*Dan. 5:11*), and the wise men who visited the baby Jesus were Magi. Magic in its broadest sense means something wonderful and mysterious. If I produce a voice out of thin air, we call it technology. If a demon produces it, we call it sorcery. If God, we call it a miracle. But the Stone Age tribesman who is standing nearby might well call all of these acts "magic."

Tolkien does little with magic in the abstract. In fact, he rarely uses the word. When Pippin asks if the cloaks he and the others have received are magic, one of the Elves responds, "I do not know what you mean by that. . . They are elvish robes certainly, if that is what you mean."<sup>12</sup> Not magic, but personal skill and prowess are in view. An elven blade might be called "magic," but so might a Stradivarius violin or a concerto by Bach.

And what of Gandalf? Isn't he a sorcerer? No, he is Valar of a lesser sort: in Biblical language, an angel. He does not channel magic energies or consort with demons. His power is his own. Saruman has a like power, but he chooses to use that power in his own selfish interests.

Yes, there are certainly demons in Middle Earth: the Balrog was one, and Sauron was chief of them all. Saruman was well on his way to becoming one. And, yes, there are sorcerers, necromancers, and witches. They are all the enemy. Their presence in *The Lord of the Rings* no more makes it an evil book series than their presence in Holy Scripture makes it a piece of occult literature.

## Formal Religion in Tolkien

A more serious question involves the worship of God. Tolkien shows us little of it. Of course, he is not obligated to. Aragorn's ancestors, the men of Numenor, trusted and hoped in Ilúvatar. His sacred mountain stood in the middle of their island. They had concourse with the Valar, who revealed to them

His will.<sup>13</sup> But only the vaguest hints of this appear in *The Lord of the Rings*.

We do, however, find our heroes invoking the aid of Elbereth, the queen of the Valar. The Valar are not quite the angels of Scripture. They have gender. They performed demiurgic labors in the shaping of Middle Earth. They have greater freedom of action than real angels seem to have and a greater ability to interact with men. And Elbereth, at least, answers prayers and is addressed in hymns. We can see Tolkien's Roman Catholicism at work here. We might well wish he had supposed angels of a different sort, but we should remember that they *are* supposals. The Valar are story elements, not objects for primary belief.

## Conclusion

No story is perfect, save one: that is God's. But some stories are a lot better than all the rest. When Calvinists learn to write epic fantasy, maybe Tolkien will have some competition. Maybe. In the meantime, let us enjoy his gifts for what they are and recognize a good story as a good story.

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<sup>1</sup> Most episodic story lines have at least one episode that never happened: *Star Trek V* and *Aliens III*, for example. Lewis's *The Last Battle* never happened. Its Platonic dismissal of Narnia and its salvation of a non-Christian heathen through natural theology ruin an already weak story line, even though there are a few gems scattered along the narrative.

<sup>2</sup> Short short stories work a little differently. They tend to turn on a clever ending, much like a joke. God, of course, is the Author of comedy as well, but that's a discussion for another time.

<sup>3</sup> Does this mean that Christians may not write stories that exclude God from their universe? Generally, yes, but there may be some exceptions. Paul very briefly offers supposals in which Christ was not crucified and did not rise from the dead (*1 Cor. 2:8; 15:13-19*). Lewis's *Till We Have Faces* treats the pagan gods as real, but those gods function as symbols for the true God. Still, these examples all have as their end the proclamation of an explicitly Biblical message.

<sup>4</sup> *Return of the King* (Ballantine edition), 173.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 169.

<sup>6</sup> Clyde S. Kilby, *Tolkien and the Silmarillion* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1976), 59. Gandalf called himself a servant of the Secret Fire (*Fellowship of the Ring*, 429).

<sup>7</sup> Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 20.

<sup>8</sup> *Fellowship of the Ring*, 88.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 318.

<sup>10</sup> *Silmarillion*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> *The Two Towers*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Fellowship of the Ring*, 479.

<sup>13</sup> See the "Akallabeth" in the *Silmarillion*.



# Christological Typologies in *The Lord of the Rings*

By Forrest W. Schultz

**T**he vocation of the Christian fictional author is similar to, yet distinct from, that of the Christian theologian. The Christian theologian has a calling from God to *teach* us the Christian worldview, *i.e.* to *tell* what life means and how it ought to be lived. The Christian fictional author has a calling from God to write stories that *embody* the Christian worldview, *i.e.* stories that *show* what life means and how it ought to be lived. To fulfill his calling the Christian storywriter must have a clear understanding of the truth about life and he must become a skilled literary craftsman in order to compose well-written stories to show us that truth. That is the vocation and criterion of Christian fiction.

It is a high calling. Stories can have a profound influence on us. Stories are also ubiquitous: everyone reads stories; few read the writings of theologians. Finally, stories are important for their own sake, and not only as a vehicle for showing us truth, because, after all, life itself is a story and God is its Author. The ability to write stories is just one of the many ways in which man is “a finite analogue of God,” to use the Van Tilian phrase.

## Christian Fantasy

Now, let us look specifically at fantasy, the genre in which *The Lord of the Rings* is written. In addition to creating an imaginary world having verisimilitude (truth likeness) and creating imaginary beings with whom the reader can empathize, the Christian fantasy author faces the additional challenge of appropriately expressing certain features of the Christian worldview in an indirect way by means of imaginary beings and objects that are *analogies* of their real-world counterparts. For example, unless the writer wants to have Satan himself as a character in the story, he will need to create a being who is an *analogy* of Satan. For instance, in C. S. Lewis’ Narnia world the White Witch is the analogy of

Satan, and in Tolkien’s Middle Earth world Sauron is the analogy of Satan.<sup>1</sup>

## The Basis For Inter-World Analogies

The only valid basis for drawing an analogy between the real world and a fantasy world is if both worlds function in accord with the same worldview. Since the real world — God’s creation — functions in accord with the Christian worldview, this means that analogies between the real world and a fantasy world can only be validly drawn if the fantasy world also functions in accord with the Christian worldview.

Since C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien were authors who expressed the Christian worldview in their fantasies, analogies can be drawn between the real world and their fantasy worlds (Narnia and Middle Earth). That *The Lord of the Rings* expresses the Christian worldview is clear not only from the many studies done on Tolkien’s life and thought, but also from Tolkien’s own explicit statements in his essay “On Fairy Stories” (found in *The Tolkien Reader*), which is a seminal article on the topic of Christian fantasy.

In contrast, inter-world analogies may not be validly drawn if the fantasy world is an expression of a false worldview. Consider, for instance, the character “Lord Foul” in Stephen Donaldson’s *Thomas Covenant* books, which express an existentialistic worldview. Donaldson’s Lord Foul is similar, in some superficial respects, to Tolkien’s Sauron, but is radically different because he is not a person but a mere personification of the evil part of Thomas Covenant. When, near the conclusion of Donaldson’s story (at the end of Volume III of the second trilogy), Covenant’s good side gains ever more victory over his evil side, Lord Foul shrinks in size. This is clearly not analogous to what happens in the real world. When a Christian gains victory over his depravity, Satan does not shrink; and when the Christian’s depravity is annihilated during his glorification, Satan does not disappear.

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## Analogy, Not Allegory

Having established the basis for the drawing of analogies between the world of Middle Earth and the real world, namely that they both express the Christian worldview, it needs to be clearly understood that these inter-world analogies are indeed *analogous*, not *allegorical*. Analogies are simply two things that correspond in particular ways; an allegory is a literary device in which the characters or objects illustrate a moral or religious principle that is often hidden in the text. Tolkien explicitly stated in the preface that his story was not to be considered as an allegory, and the internal evidence of the work itself bears this out.

## Exegesis, Not Eisegesis

The terms “exegesis” and “eisegesis” apply not only to the Bible, but to any written work. Analogies between the real world and Tolkien’s world can only be drawn correctly by means of *exegesis* (*i.e.* drawing them “out of” Tolkien’s world), never by means of *eisegesis* (*i.e.* reading them “into” Tolkien’s world).

In short, we must use our minds to discern the analogies that are intrinsically there in Middle Earth and then draw them out. We must not put there what we might like to find there to support some idea or some cause, as, for instance, some opponents of nuclear warfare have done by interpreting The Ring as the atomic bomb. On the other hand, we must not conclude that because Tolkien did not spell out for us what these analogies are, there are none. Tolkien is too sophisticated for us to expect any such spoon feeding from him. He expects us to figure out these analogies for ourselves and to do so respecting the integrity of his world.

## Analogy, Not Confusion

Since things in the fantasy world belong in the fantasy world and not in the real world, it is improper to expect to see them in the real world or to try to bring them into the real world. For example, we should not expect to see hobbits and orcs in the real world. What we see is analogies of hobbits and orcs in the real world, *i.e.* we see humble people following the Lord and wicked people following Satan. And we should not try to bring the fantasy world into the real world by means of fantasy role playing games.<sup>2</sup> This principle of the separation of worlds also means that we are not supposed to try and escape from this world into the fantasy world. We are to sojourn for a while in the fantasy world and then come back to live in the real world empowered for service to God by the edification we have

received from reading about the fantasy world. There are analogies between the two worlds but these worlds are also separate and must not be confused.

## The Concept of a “Christ-Figure”

One of the greatest challenges of Christian fantasy concerns how Jesus Christ will be involved in the story. Unless the writer wants to restrict his story to the surface level (with Christ present only as an implicit presupposition), he will face a choice of either having Christ Himself as a character or else having an analogy of Christ as a character. Such an analogy of Christ in Christian fantasy is sometimes called a “Christ-figure.” For instance, in Lewis’ Narnia, the Christ-figure is Aslan. This raises the question: is there a Christ-figure in Middle Earth, and, if so, who is it?

## Three Partial Christ-Figures

Those who have sought for a Christ-figure in *The Lord of the Rings* have done so unsuccessfully, either failing to find one or disagreeing as to the identity of the one. This is because there is no *one* Christ-figure there. Rather, there are three *partial* Christ-figures, each embodying some of the attributes of Christ, and who work together and jointly accomplish in Middle Earth the analogy of Christ’s ministry. These three are Gandalf as prophet and teacher, Frodo as suffering servant and sin bearer, and Strider-Aragorn as returning King and Messiah. These three correspond to Christ’s three offices of prophet, priest, and king, respectively.

## Gandalf as Prophet

The Old Testament prophets were distinguished by two salient characteristics: they spoke on behalf of God, bringing guidance at crucial times in history, and they often possessed miraculous powers to authenticate their prophetic office and to help carry forward God’s will. Christ was *the Prophet* because He embodied both of these traits fully and without blemish. Gandalf functioned as the prophet in Middle Earth because he invariably appeared at the critical times in the unfolding of the story to guide and direct the actions of the various characters. Like the Old Testament prophets and like Christ, Gandalf could and did employ miracles to authenticate his office and to help accomplish his mission.

## Frodo as Priest

Frodo was the analogy of the “suffering servant” and the “bearer-destroyer of sin” aspects of the ministry of Christ. Like Christ, he was meek and lowly in outward appearance and came from an obscure rustic location, the Shire (cf. Jesus from

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Nazareth in Galilee). The Ring was a real burden to Frodo, which weighed him down; and his task, like Christ's, involved an intense amount of anguish, pain, suffering, and personal sacrifice. He alone could bear the Ring, just as Christ alone could bear our sins. To destroy the Ring, Frodo had to enter Sauron's (cf. Satan's) territory and be abused by his minions. By the time he neared his destination, Frodo was so weak that Sam had to carry him up Mt. Doom, just as Christ became so weak prior to the crucifixion that someone else had to carry the Cross up Mt. Calvary. The destruction of the Ring in the fires of Mt. Doom (cf. sin consumed by the fire of God's wrath on Mt. Calvary) defeated Sauron, just as Christ on the Cross defeated Satan. Like Christ's, Frodo's mission was a vicarious sacrifice, *i.e.* he did it on behalf of others, and his body bore the wounds incurred in his work (the shoulder wound from the Nazgul's dart, the sting in the neck from Shelob, and the finger severed by Gollum) just as Christ's body bore the stigmata. In all these ways Frodo's role was analogous to Christ's priestly office.

### **Aragorn as King**

Strider-Aragorn was the returning King and Messiah in Middle Earth in a manner strikingly similar to the royal office of Jesus Christ. Like Jesus, Aragorn was the direct descendant in a regal lineage that had ceased to occupy the throne since a time of decadence in the nation's past. Like Israel, Gondor possessed a literature which prophesied a national deliverer who would appear at a critical time to reunite the nation, occupy the vacant throne, defeat the nation's enemies, and restore the nation's grandeur. Like Jesus, Aragorn's identity was known at first only to a few, but became more clearly discernable to more and more people as the day approached. It is very significant that one of the distinguishing characteristics of Gondor's King-Messiah, like Israel's, was the ability to heal illnesses. As soon as Aragorn began his healings in Minas Tirith, the word spread rapidly that the King had returned, just as many people in Israel believed in Jesus' Messiahship when they witnessed the healings He performed in Galilee and Judea.

### **Analogies of Israel**

Tolkien's three partial Christ-figures typology is meshed with an imaginative analogous portrayal of what might have happened if after the resurrection the leaders and people of Israel had received Jesus Christ as King instead of spurning Him. The contrast between what actually happened in Israel and what could have happened is seen in the contrast

between Gondor's stewards Denethor and Faramir. Gondor's old steward Denethor had an attitude toward Aragorn similar to that of the first century Jewish leaders toward Christ. Denethor loved his own power and detested the thought of turning it over to another. He also resisted Gandalf (cf. OT prophets and Christ), stumbled at the "foolishness" of Frodo going to Mordor to destroy the Ring (cf. the "foolishness" of the Cross), and rejected the kingship of Aragorn. His thoughts were influenced by Sauron; they proved to be suicidal. In striking contrast was the attitude of the new steward, Faramir. He had a high regard for Gandalf and later developed a high regard for Frodo when he met him, as a result of which he assisted him in his plan to enter Mordor. Later, the king healed him and the king saved his nation. In gratitude he welcomed the king. And at the coronation, he followed Aragorn's instructions of how the ceremony was to be performed. This is analogous to what we know the attitude of the repentant Jews will be in the future as they fulfill Zechariah 12:10ff.

### **Christ-like Traits**

Four traits of Jesus Christ were common to all three partial Christ-figures. Their ministries were absolutely essential for the triumph of good over evil. Each was "elected" for his role, *i.e.* he did not decide on his own initiative to save Middle Earth, but accepted the lot that was chosen for him. Each was motivated by a sacrificial love and duty rather than personal pleasure and expediency. They all had to pass through "death" and "Hell" emerging victorious and be raised to new heights of power. Gandalf the Grey arose and became Gandalf the White after descending into the depths of Moria to defeat the Balrog. Frodo entered Mordor to defeat Sauron and was "resurrected" by the eagle. Strider passed through The Paths of the Dead victorious over death.

### **The Symbolic Actions of Gandalf and Frodo at Aragorn's Coronation**

All of the parallels noted above between the Gandalf-Frodo-Aragorn team and the threefold office of Christ should amply serve to demonstrate the point that each of the three is a partial Christ-figure. But there is one incident that even now dramatically depicts this point. This incident is the climactic moment of the crowning of Aragorn as king. Aragorn returns the crown to Faramir and explains that the Ring-bearer Frodo *must* bring the crown to him and that Gandalf *must* place it upon

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his head; and thus it was done. This beautifully and poignantly drives home the all-important truths that the path to the Crown lies through the Cross, and that both the Cross and the Crown are only attainable in accord with the wisdom and plan of God. Neither Frodo nor Aragorn could have accomplished their offices without the guidance of Gandalf. This is why Aragorn insisted that it be Gandalf who place the crown upon his head because Gandalf “has been the mover of all that has been accomplished and this is his victory.”

## Typology

Unlike most fantasy worlds, Middle Earth is portrayed as our Earth in an imaginary remote past.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, it is clear that the three partial Christ-figures — Gandalf, Frodo, Aragorn — are not only analogies of Christ, but are also *types* of Christ because they share common traits with Him. To be more specific and accurate, each of these three is a type of one of the *offices* of Christ: prophet, priest, king.

In this way, Tolkien’s Christological analogy differs from that of C. S. Lewis. Narnia is not the past of Earth, but is an entirely distinct world that coexists in time with Earth. Aslan in Narnia is the analogy of Christ *en toto*, *i.e.*, Aslan is an incarnation of God in a creature, and, consequently is sinless, doesn’t make mistakes, provides atonement for sin and complete salvation, and wins a complete and final victory over evil. But in Middle Earth the partial Christ-figures (Gandalf, Frodo, Aragorn) are conjointly only *types* of Christ, *i.e.*, they *prefigure* what Christ Himself will do in the future when He comes. They, like the Old Testament types of Christ, are not divine, are not sinless, can and do make mistakes, and do not provide a full and complete salvation and victory over evil, but only provide a very limited salvation and victory, which foreshadows the complete salvation and victory which Christ will provide in the future.

Everything I have said must be seen from this typological perspective. Gandalf and Frodo and Aragorn are, respectively, adumbrations of the offices of Christ: prophet, priest, and king. They do not and cannot do the work of Christ Himself because, unlike Aslan in a different world, they are in this world in a remote imaginary past and therefore can only prefigure, typologically, what Christ will do in the future. Middle Earth is a fantasy world. But it is portrayed as the remote past of our world, not as a totally different world, like Narnia

The subject of typology is enormously complex and controversial, and the subject of Christian

fiction, especially Christian fantasy, needs a lot more study also. The road goes ever on. Lord willing, others can help provide further light on this matter somewhere along the road the Lord is leading them.

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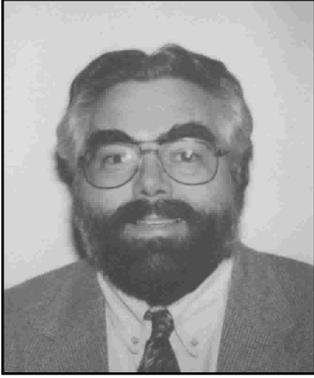
<sup>1</sup> Except for a few hints to the contrary, the text of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* appears to depict Sauron as the analogy of Satan, and so in those stories Sauron essentially functions as the Satan character, though in the corpus of Middle Earth stories as a whole, Sauron is only a minion. *The Silmarillion* (which Tolkien did not complete, and thus it remained unpublished until after his death) portrays a character named Morgoth as the analogy of Satan, and Sauron as one of his lieutenants. Strictly speaking, therefore, Sauron is not the analogy of Satan but of one of Satan’s chief demons.

<sup>2</sup> These games not only involve the “playing with fire” danger noted by Gary North and others, but they also trivialize the fantasy world. Serious matters are involved here; it’s not a game. What we are supposed to do is apply here on this real Earth the lessons embodied in the characters and story of Middle Earth.

<sup>3</sup> Here and there in the story we are provided with the reasons why we do not see these fantasy beings anymore, *e.g.*, the elves sailed away to their true home or forsook their immortality and became like men.

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# A Christian Philosophy of History: Christocentric Principles

*By Roger Schultz*

“Give me a place to stand, and I will move the earth!” So spoke the ancient Greek philosopher and geometer Archimedes as he discussed the possibilities of the lever and the need for a solid foundation. Historians also need a fixed starting point for historical investigation and interpretation. There is no way to assign meaning to history unless one has a proper foundation. For the Christian historian, the task is straightforward.

For Christians, all history is Christocentric. The pivotal events in the history of the universe were Christ-centered: the incarnation, substitutionary sacrifice, resurrection and ascension of Christ. Revelation 13:8 refers to the Lamb of God who was slain before the foundation of the world. However one translates the verse, it is clear that even before creation God’s overarching cosmic purposes pointed to Calvary. Galatians 4:4 states that Jesus came “in the fullness of time.” The Apostle Paul preached that God would judge the world in righteousness through the resurrected Christ (*Ac. 17:35*). And Jesus Himself emphasized His return, the consummation of history, and His rendering judgment on the nations (*Mt. 24-25*). Scripture is clear: history is Christ-centered.

One task of the Christian historian is to explain how Christian convictions influence our understanding of the past. Using the testimony of Scripture, we must seek Christocentric principles in a Biblical philosophy of history.

## “Meta-Historical”

First, Christian history is “meta-historical.” The meaning of history comes from outside of history, arising from God’s sovereign design. We must understand the true meaning, purpose and direction of history from God’s revealed Word.

Colossians 1:16-20 has an excellent, overarching statement of God’s work in history through Christ. All things were created through Christ and are held together by Him. God is at work reconciling all things to Himself, through Christ’s blood shed on the cross. It is the Father’s ultimate purpose that

Christ will have first place in all things. From God’s point of view, true history is Christ-centered.

Second, Christian history is covenantal. Scripture is rich with covenantal language and promises. The promise to Adam and Eve after the fall (*Gen. 3:15*) was Christocentric, pointing to the Seed of Woman who would crush the serpent’s head. The promise to Abraham (*Gen. 12:3*), that through his seed all the nations of earth would be blessed, is also Christ-centered. Paul even argues that in this promise Abraham heard the gospel preached (*Gal. 3:8*).

The great southern Presbyterian theologian R. L. Dabney argued that behind all earthly covenants stands a divine “Covenant of Redemption.” It was “a covenant existing from all eternity between the Father and the Son,” and one from which the Covenant of Grace arose.<sup>1</sup> Before time began, according to Dabney’s perspective, the Father promised to give His Son an elect people in exchange for His sacrifice on the cross. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Question 31) alludes to this covenant. And just before going to Calvary, Jesus gives thanks for and makes intercession in terms of this covenant with the Father (*Jn. 17*). History, then, concerns the unfolding of God’s eternal plan to redeem a people in Christ.

Third, Christian history is presuppositional. It must be noted that every approach to history rests upon basic presuppositions that contain fundamental interpretive elements. Few truly believe, as Henry Ford did, that history is “bunk.” And apart from disillusioned students in undergraduate history courses, few would agree with Mark Twain that history is just “one darn thing after another!” (If history is utter nonsense, why bother to study it or speculate concerning its merits?)

Though secularists speak disdainfully of “meta-historical narratives,” all approaches to the past stress meta-historical themes. Liberals emphasize that history reveals a progressive evolution toward a fuller human freedom and democratization. Marxists focus on economic factors, class strife, and the inevitability of the coming revolution. Even

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postmodernists, who deny the existence of meta-historical narratives, insist that an underlying historical theme is the corruption of historical knowledge by power elites and modern ideologies.

## No Neutral Histories

Furthermore, all historical approaches are essentially religious. Every historical interpretation is based upon certain presuppositions that are rooted in a worldview based upon religious assumptions (*e.g.*, concerning the nature of truth and justice, the nature of man, and questions of morality). Some of the most frenzied modernists are those who ridicule the Christian faith, while simultaneously crusading to save the whales, the rainforest, the snail-darter, or whatever other cause is trendy. These erstwhile secularists are simply motivated by a different religion.

Rushdoony has argued persuasively that religious presuppositions are inescapable. "Neutralism," he writes in the *Nature of the American System*, "is one of the persistent errors of the modern era."<sup>2</sup> Modern man makes himself and his knowledge the sole source of autonomous authority, he continues, and man is the final "court of appeal." Rushdoony concludes his essay by saying: "The alternative to 'In God we trust' is 'In man we trust,' or in reason, science, the experimental system, an elite, or some like entity. In any and every case it is a *religious* affirmation. The presuppositions of all man's thinking are inescapably religious, and they are never neutral."<sup>3</sup>

Fourth, Christian history is teleological, moving purposefully toward a divine end. God is at work, for example, to give Christ first place in all things (*Col. 1:18*). The Father promises to place all things in subjection to His only begotten Son (*Heb. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:27*). God will sum up all things in heaven and on earth, Paul argues, in the fullness of time, in Christ Jesus (*Eph. 1:10*). And Scripture identifies Christ as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (*Rev. 1:8; 21:6*).

Fifth, Christian history is doxological, directing us to worship the Triune God. Ephesians 1:3-14 is a glorious Scriptural hymn revolving around the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each of the three sections conclude with the statement of "to the praise of the glory of His grace," or "to the praise of His glory" (*vv. 6, 12, 14*). Having talked about God's electing grace, His predestining mercy, the redemptive work of Christ and God's sovereign power, Paul affirms that we exist for "the praise of His glory" (*v. 12*)<sup>4</sup>. The very purpose of our existence is doxological — to bring glory to Christ. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism states (Question 1): "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever."

That is something we readily confess when sharing our personal narratives. We understand how God has worked in our lives; we see first-hand His tender mercies; we glory in His grace. We can testify to God's direct work in saving us, in preserving us, and teaching us. While it is more complicated to see the doxological character of all human history, Scripture assures us that the past has that function.

And finally, Christian history is challenging and confrontational. It confronts persons and nations with the claims of the gospel and King Jesus. Psalm 2, the great Messianic psalm that has a central position in the New Testament, depicts the nations, peoples, and kings and rulers in rebellion against the Lord and His Anointed. According to Acts 4:24-28, the psalm is fulfilled at the crucifixion of Christ. The psalm's admonition has special application to a New Covenant people: "Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!"

## Calendars

The modern western calendar is an excellent example of how a Christocentric vision of history was applied. We date all time from Christ — measuring years "before Christ" and "*Anno Domini*" (in the year of our Lord).<sup>5</sup> The use of "A.D." is a testimony to the influence of Christ on our world. Even the diploma on my wall, issued by the University of Arkansas (a state institution at the time under the Clinton governorship), announces that my degree was conferred "in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred eighty-nine."

The western practice of marking time from Christ is anathema for secularists. Politically correct and fashionable textbooks frequently use C.E. and B.C.E. (the *common era* and *before the common era*). It is not the first time that modernists have flouted the importance and authority of Christ. During the French Revolution radicals created a new calendar with 1792 as the new Year One. (They also renamed and reconfigured the months; each month was made up of three ten-day weeks.) Italian fascists also created a new calendar, commemorating Mussolini's rise to power. The Soviets briefly adopted a revolutionary calendar, in 1929, though it only lasted eleven years. (They also reconfigured the months: in their initial calendar each month had six five-day weeks.) These futile experiments are reminiscent of the rebellion in Psalm 2, where the nations conspired to tear off the bonds of the Lord's Anointed.

Historically, calendars had great symbolic significance. They were important in charting the rise of nations and

cultures.<sup>6</sup> Calendars also had deep religious meaning.<sup>7</sup> England didn't adopt a modernized calendar until 1752, for instance, fearing that the Gregorian calendar reforms were a papist plot.<sup>8</sup> Calendars were also important in the ancient world to chronicle the ascent of kings and chart the rise of dynasties.

The Christian West measures calendar time from the first advent of Christ. It is proper to do so. After all, God views history and His creation Christocentrically — revolving around His Son and His redemptive purposes in Christ. As the Christmas season approaches and we commemorate the coming of Christ, we recognize that all history is gauged in the terms of the Lord Jesus, our Savior and King.

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<sup>1</sup>R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, [1878] 1985), 432.

<sup>2</sup>Rousas Rushdoony, *The Nature of the American System* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, [1965] 1978), 67.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid*, 78.

<sup>4</sup>I know an Arminian seminary professor who admits that it was difficult to read through Ephesians without becoming a Calvinist. But he worked hard, he cheerfully confesses, and was able to get through it.

<sup>5</sup>The first to propose the use of A.D. (the year of our Lord) was a sixth century monk, Dionysius Exiguus. The new dating system was popularized by the Venerable Bede, the English ecclesiastical historian. The use of B.C. became popular much later. Those interested in the religious and cultural uses of calendars, see Daniel Boorstin, *The Discoverers* (N.Y.: Vintage, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>Ancient Greeks started the calendar with the first Olympics, dated from 776 B.C., an event that showed a measure of cultural and religious unity. The Romans measured time from 753 B.C., the traditional date for the founding of Rome by Romulus.

<sup>7</sup>Muslims measure time from the Hegira, an event in the life of Mohammed, which occurred in AD 622.

<sup>8</sup>The Julian calendar, established by Julius Caesar, was slightly inaccurate and by the sixteenth century was a number of days off. Pope Gregory XIII (p.1572-85) authorized the calendar changes that bear his name in 1582. Gregory was also a vigorous supporter of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation and a foe of Protestantism, especially in England. Mindful of Gregory's record and Biblical warnings about the one who sought to make "alterations in times and in law" (*Dan 7:25*), the English refused to adopt the Gregorian calendar. It wasn't until 1752 that Great Britain switched to the New Style calendar.

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