Seeking the Lord of Middle Earth: Theological Essays on J.R.R. Tolkien

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This book is dedicated to Biff Rocha and Jason Shanks.
During my own conversion, Biff was my J. R. R. Tolkien
and Jason was my C. S. Lewis.
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My love of J. R. R. Tolkien began prior to my love for theology. Early in my seventh grade year, self-identifying as an agnostic Jew, I was rummaging through the boxes of books in my grandparents’s attic. I stumbled across aged copies of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, and *The Silmarillion*. Leafing through their torn covers, the attractive smell of old and dry book pages wafting up, I decided I would try to read them in my spare time. With my grandparents’ permission, I took them home. I decided to start with *The Hobbit*. If I found it boring, I would not bother with the rest. But I could not put the book down. I stayed up all night, and into the next, until the book was completed. After a day’s rest, I picked up the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. I read late into the night, only forcing myself to put it down and get some sleep when morning broke. I finished the book over the next few days. By the end of the week, I had finished the entire series. Just shy of a decade later, after my baptism, I would begin to describe Tolkien’s work as having baptized my imagination.

As a pre-teen, I found *The Silmarillion* less interesting and less enjoyable than Tolkien’s other works. I completed it, but it took far greater effort, and, whereas I would habitually reread *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* several times a year until I began graduate school, I was unable to do that with *The Silmarillion*. It was only after my conversion to Christianity, and my entrance into the Catholic Church at the Easter Vigil of 1999, that I began to have a newfound appreciation for that rich epic along with
its theological resonances. It was only as I began to read about the life of Tolkien that I learned of his own childhood conversion to Catholicism, and the profound role of his Catholic faith upon virtually every aspect of his life and much of his work as well. Theology eventually became my profession, as I went off to graduate school and earned advanced degrees in theology, and came to teach and study theology at the university and seminary.

This present volume thus represents the intersection of two of my great loves: Tolkien’s writings and Christian theology. The fruit of many years, the essays in this volume seek to combine these passions to show how Christian theology can illuminate various aspects of Tolkien’s life and work, and, also, how Tolkien’s work can benefit Christian theology. Indeed, when seeking the Lord of Middle Earth we find ourselves face-to-face with the God of heaven and earth.