

Religion of Middle-Earth

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 24 Nov 1999

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Mitchell A. Bailey — 24 Nov 1999, 14:36

At the risk of being exiled to the (nonexistent) Tolkien list, I'll interject a comment or two here.

Ouroboros wrote:

I also, recall him [Tolkien] conceding that ..there was no real Religion in Middle Earth ...let alone a Judeo-Christian one.

although the world of Middle Earth has no overt worship or ritual that's not quite the same thing as saying that there is no religion.

Tolkien's Arda is pre-Mosaic, and almost certainly antediluvian. The revealed Catholic church to which Tolkien and Wolfe did/do belong is in Arda's far future, so Tolkien could deal in a hypothetical primeval faith in Iluvatar unadorned by Noahic or Mosaic revelation, much less Christianity as we understand it.

There actually ARE scattered suggestions of religious observances: the festival at which the faithful Numenorean Kings would ascend the Meneltarma to meditate on the blessings of Eru, the "Standing Silence" observed by the inhabitants of Minas Tirith before meals.

However, there is no Church and no priests. It would appear that a Melchizedekian fusion of priesthood/kingship may have occurred with the Numenoreans and their successors. The only suggestions of highly organized religion were evil; Sauron's corruption and deception of the fallen Numenoreans which led them to appoint him a high priest of Melkor and practice human sacrifice on their behalf, for instance.

One profound difference between Middle earth and our world is that Manwe and the Valar knew Iluvatar and the Eldar knew the Valar

...

Indeed

'faith' is not required when any passing elf could supply you with the chief angel's address.

..

Again

faith becomes moot if one can board ship and visit the Increate's servants.

But with Tolkien, it didn't really work that way, did it? Morgoth, Sauron, and the Balrogs, and eventually Saruman, were all originally Ainur who once had participated in the Music of the Ainur and dwelt in the presence of Iluvatar Himself. Yet they rebelled and fell. Feanor dwelt in Valinor in the favor of Manwe and Aule, yet revolted readily for the sake of his baubles. His kin likewise rebelled against the Valar, either as allies or in despite of Feanor. The Numenoreans in their turn broke faith, rebelled, and fell , literally.

... Today God or the Increate is not susceptible to proofs of reality. What might change if at some future date it were otherwise?

Much more competent critics than myself have argued that Tolkien's Arda cycle is one big exploration of the role of individual faith in the divine agenda and of the free will/predestination paradox. To Tolkien, at least, there would be no "proof" until all could stand in the presence of Eru at the End. And I think that the same message can be found in Wolfe, esp. in *Long Sun*. The people of Urth have overlain the deity behind the Conciliator with chiliads of tradition and dogma and theological sophistry (rather like the smothering of the Old Sun), but the Increate, outside mortal comprehension, is still back there behind all. And more plainly, LS's aptly named Outsider bypasses dogma and the superfluous computer Windows to directly inspire Silk, priest of the artificial religion formed around Typhon's simulation. There is the intercessory Church (or the manteion, or the hypostases and pantocrators and heptarchs), and there is the occasion to bypass the intercessor and deal directly with God.