

Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull (eds.),
The Lord of the Rings. Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder,
Review by P.H. Brazier
The C.S. Lewis Chronicle Vol. 7, No. 1, Hilary 2010

Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull (eds.), *The Lord of the Rings. Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder.* Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006. 387 pp. ISBN 9780874620184.

Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, in *The Lord of the Rings: Scholarship in Honour of Richard E. Blackwelder*, have produced a perceptive, judicious and a highly knowledgeable volume. Published to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the first publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, these twenty essays were initially presented at the Tolkien conference at Marquette University (21-23 October 2004). The volume is also published in memory of the late Dr Richard E. Blackwelder, a noted Tolkien aficionado. The essays in this volume are, like Tolkien's work, about sin and its consequences, and the teleological relationship between creation and sentient creatures represented by Tolkien in mythopoeic narrative. Reading the volume as a whole makes clear how implicitly theological, indeed Patristic, *The Lord of the Rings* is in terms of its doctrine of sin and its theological anthropology.

Approximately half the papers examine *The Lord of the Rings*, while the remaining scrutinize Tolkien's achievement as a writer of mythology, but also as a philologist and Oxford professor. The list of contributors reads as an inventory of Tolkienian scholarship: Douglas A. Anderson, David Bratman, Marjorie Burns, Jane Chance, Michael D.C. Drout, Matthew A. Fisher, Verlyn Flieger, Mike Foster, John Garth, Wayne G. Hammond, Carl F. Hostetter, Sumner G. Hunnewell, John D. Rateliff, Christina Scull, T.A. Shippey, Arden R. Smith, Paul Edmund Thomas, Richard C. West, and Arne Zettersten. Many of these essays explore the evolution of the book, the artistry of omissions and revisions, and how exactly Tolkien planned the work, but there are also many thematic essays: the small, obscure hobbit Frodo in relation to the great war, the relationship between mythic prehistory and the popular world of Middle Earth. Several essays work on the comparison between *Beowulf* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and the relationship of Tolkien's mythopoeic creations with popular culture.

Among the essays, a few are of special note to the theologian. Richard C. West's "Her Choice was Made and her Doom Appointed": Tragedy and Divine Comedy in the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen' moves the debate towards what can appear to be an

existential doctrine of election: fate, decision and choice, and the evidence of divine determination. Matthew Fisher's 'Working at the Crossroads: Tolkien, St Augustine, and the *Beowulf* Poet' advances the (now popular) discussion of the significant question of the relationship between Tolkien's faith as a Catholic Christian and the religious nature of Tolkien's works. Fisher draws widely in relatively obscure letters and sources, and goes some way to placing Tolkien's myth vis-à-vis his Catholic tradition. In this context, Fisher examines Augustine of Hippo's doctrine of theological anthropology, centred on human nature and grace. He argues that Tolkien was working at the intersection of 'Northern courage' and the theology of Augustine. Fisher therefore discusses how the insights and conclusions drawn from this intersection relate to how our own actions may profoundly alter the outcome of a time when we are led into temptation greater than we believe we can bear, but also the potential in humble individuals to accomplish truly heroic actions in situations where defeat appears to be inevitable, when love and goodness seem utterly destroyed. And so we have an Augustinian Beowulf of sorts.

These essays deserve a wider audience for their work at the interface of story/narrative, theology and philosophy.

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