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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

**The Relationship of Religion and Fantasy:
The Influence of Christianity on the Fictional Religion
in the Fantasy Genre**

Vztah náboženství a fantasy:
Vliv Křesťanství na fiktivní náboženství v žánru fantasy

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to identify and analyse the relationship between religion, specifically Christianity, and the genre of fantasy, through an in-depth discursive analysis of these themes on a sample of selected works of post WWII fantasy. It primarily focuses on a contrastive comparison of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* and Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*. The consecutive chapters analyse these works firstly in terms of content, meaning the utilization of the structure of biblical theology in the fictional religions, or specific manifestations of Christian values, beliefs and dogmas in the texts. Secondly, in terms of form of the narrative, specifically the presence or absence of worship, and utilization of Christianity in the language of worship. The thesis identifies the template of a fantasy work created with Christian values in mind provided by Tolkien and the different approaches of Martin and Donaldson, who derivate from this template to some degree. Special attention is payed to the concepts of Good and Evil in *The Lord of the Rings* and the subsequent character traits and aspiration attributed with it in relation to Christianity, the similarities of Faith of Seven and Christianity in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and the roles of Creator and Covenant in *Thomas Covenant*. Finally, the thesis also briefly considers other authors, such as Pullman, Rowling, or L'Engle and their utilization of Christian theology; thus, a trace of development in the genre is attempted.

Keywords

fantasy, religion, Christianity, Tolkien, Martin, Donaldson

ABSTRAKT

Cílem této bakalářské práce je pomocí podrobné diskurzivní analýzy několika vybraných děl žánru fantasy vydaných po Druhé Světové válce identifikovat a analyzovat vztah mezi náboženstvím, přesněji Křesťanstvím, a žánrem fantasy. Práce se v první řadě věnuje porovnání Tolkienova *Pána Prstenů*, Martinovy *Písně Ledu a Ohně* a Donaldsonových *Kronik Thomase Covenanta Nevěrců*. Jednotlivé kapitoly se zabývají analýzou těchto děl, jednak co se týče obsahu, a to zejména z hlediska zužitkování struktury biblické teologie ve fiktivních náboženstvích nebo konkrétních projevů křesťanských hodnot, dogmat a přesvědčení ve vybraných textech. Za druhé se pak práce zaměří na formu narativů, konkrétně zda jsou v nich přítomny otevřené projevy uctívání, a případné využití křesťanských vzorů v jazyce uctívání. Dále práce identifikuje Tolkienův vzor fantasy díla vytvořeného na křesťanských hodnotách a analyzuje odlišný přístup Martina a Donaldsona a míru jejich odklonu od tohoto vzoru. Zvláštní pozornost bude věnována konceptům Dobra a Zla v *Pánovi Prstenů* a charakterovým vlastnostem a aspiracím s nimi spojeným, dále podobnostem Víry v Sedm a Křesťanství v *Písni Ledu a Ohně*, a roli Stvořitele v *Thomasi Covenantovi*. V poslední řadě práce krátce uváže další fantasy autory, například Pullmana, Rowlingovou nebo L'Engle z hlediska míry využití křesťanské teologie v jejich dílech, přičemž se pokusí najít v rámci žánru stopy vývoje.

Klíčová slova

fantasy, náboženství, Křesťanství, Tolkien, Martin, Donaldson

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and Aims of the Thesis

In the last twenty centuries of the history of the Anglo-Saxon world, Christianity was one of the most important forces influencing all the aspects of life: politics, society, culture, ethics, daily life and also art. While the position of Christianity in the society is way more secular nowadays, Christian values, dogmas and also elements of theological structure have worked their ways into not only the spiritual and cultural awareness of the society, but by extension, also the art it created.

In the works of the fantasy authors published in the second half of the 20th century, the influence of Christianity can be found in both content and form: it can be traced in the artificially created religious background of the fictional worlds in those works, and in the language of worship as well. In the development of fantasy as a genre, J.R.R.Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* presents a model of a fantasy narrative created with Christianity in mind unique to him; the works of later authors George R.R.Martin (*A Song of Ice and Fire*) and Stephen R. Donaldson (*The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*), who derive from Tolkien to a degree, offer slightly different ways of incorporating aspects of Christianity. First chapter will provide the objectives of the thesis, methodology and define the terminology used in the thesis. Second chapter will attempt to provide context and set the authors in it, both of fantasy genre (and in case of Martin and Donaldson, the relation to Tolkien) and in terms of their relationship with Christianity. Consequent chapters will focus on individual authors.

Furthermore, other fantasy writers who are contemporary to or succeeding Tolkien divert from his model in other specific ways. By comparison of those, traces of development can be found in the genre. The aim of this thesis is to explore those influences to content and

form in the works of the three aforementioned authors with Tolkien being the stepping stone, and then setting the results to the context of the genre among other fantasy writers such as Phillip Pullman, J.K.Rowling, or Madeleine L'Engle. This analysis will be the content of chapter 6. Last chapter will provide a conclusion.

1.2 Methodology and Sources

The aims of the thesis will be achieved by a close analysis of the selected works from the fantasy genre on a theoretical foundation of the books and essays by established academics. From each of the three authors, the main examples of their work were selected for consideration of the thesis. Firstly, from J.R.R.Tolkien, the *Lord of the Rings* (*The Fellowship of the Rings*, *The Two Towers*, *The Return of the King*) trilogy will be analysed. Those three books were selected because they comprise the core of Tolkien's work and a comprehensive introduction to the mechanics of Tolkien's otherworld. While other books by Tolkien such as *The Silmarillion* might also bring interesting input to the topic (especially the comparison of Tolkien's creation myth and Christianity), including them would be too extensive for the scope of this thesis. Secondly, G.R.R.Martin will be represented by five yet published volumes of his saga *A Song of Ice and Fire* (*A Game of Thrones*, *A Clash of Kings*, *A Storm of Swords*, *A Feast for Crows*, *A Dance with Dragons*). Finally, the initial trilogy *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* (*Lord Foul's Bane*, *The Illearth War*, *The Power that Preserves*) will be selected from Donaldson's body of work. Out of the three, Tolkien has been selected for his unique position in the genre of modern fantasy as a re-populariser of the genre. Donaldson and Martin have both admitted to being inspired by Tolkien's legacy and have often been called his successors in terms of expanding and increasing the popularity of the genre of fantasy.

The works of the three main authors will be considered from two points of view: firstly, in terms of the influence of Christianity on the content, specifically analysing the ways

in which Christianity is manifested in the narrative content of the story, such as the values and characterization, or the creation of actual fictional religions within the narrative. Secondly, in terms of the influence of Christianity on the form, specifically the language of worship and its eventual structural similarities to the biblical narrative.

The authors' input on the topic will also be considered. Tolkien wrote about Christianity and *The Lord of the Rings* in many of his letters; therefore, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* by Humphrey Carpenter will be used. The source of Martin's input mainly lies in the many interviews he has given in the last couple of years due to the popularity of the HBO TV series based on *A Song of Ice and Fire*. As for Donaldson, the interviews and fan questions answered on his official website will provide his input on the matter.

1.3 Terminology

This thesis considers religion, specifically Christianity, within the boundaries of fantasy as a genre. As far as terminology goes, it will mainly rely on definitions provided by Clute and Grant's *The Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, which was made available online with the permission of the authors, and also Colin Manlove's chapter "Introduction to Modern Fantasy" anthologized in *Fantasy literature: A critical reader* by Sandner.

The thesis considers religion according to Clute, who understands the term as a structure of beliefs shared by a society, as opposed to individual faith in a specific deity¹.

1.3.1 Definition of fantasy

On the other hand, 'fantasy' is much harder to clearly define, as evidenced by the struggle of many academics mainly in the second half of the twentieth century. *Encyclopaedia*

¹ John Clute and John Grant, eds. "Religion" *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, 1997 ed., <<http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=religion>>. Accessed 16.6.2017. All the entries referenced from this encyclopaedia are cited from the online version.

Britannica defines it as “imaginative fiction dependent for effect on strangeness of setting (such as other worlds or times) and of characters (such as supernatural or unnatural beings).”² Clute’s *Encyclopaedia* contrasts fantasy texts with Realism and introduces the notion that it is comprised of stories created by their authors as impossible (although impossibility is not their main point). To elaborate on the aspect of impossibility; according to his entry on ‘fantasy’, there are two possible settings for a self-coherent fantasy text. Firstly, it might be set in the real world, in which the story would be impossible; or it can be set in a so called ‘otherworld’ (or ‘secondary world’), the terms of which allow for the story to happen.³ The ‘otherworld’, per *The Encyclopaedia*’s definition, is an autonomous world defined by its impossibility in terms of the reader’s understanding (e.g. Middle Earth or Westeros).⁴ Fantasy texts set in such worlds, the plot of which is concerned with the destiny of them – such as all three works in the main focus of this thesis - belong to the genre of ‘high fantasy’.⁵

Much like Clute, Manlove points out the aspect of impossibility in fantasy, which he also calls ‘wonder’ or ‘supernatural’.⁶ To him, this ‘wonder’ is the central feature of any fantasy text. This is also furthermore supported by Todorov’s definition of ‘the fantastic’ as a story in which events that might be considered unusual often have a supernatural explanation.⁷

Manlove uses Charles Kingsley’s definition of the supernatural aspect as something of “another order of reality from that in which we exist and form our notions of possibility”⁸.

However, Manlove also deems crucial that the supernatural in fantasy should be (or become through the story) at least partially familiar to the reader and the characters; it is not desirable

² “Fantasy”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2012 ed., <<https://www.britannica.com/art/fantasy-narrative-genre>>. Accessed 31.7.2017. Online version.

³ “Fantasy”, *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, <<http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=fantasy>>. Accessed 16.6.2017.

⁴ “Otherworld”, *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, <<http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=otherworld>>. Accessed 16.6.2017.

⁵ “High fantasy”, *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, <http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=high_fantasy>. 17.6.2017

⁶ Colin Manlove “Introduction to Modern Fantasy”, *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Sandner. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004) 156.

⁷ “Fantastic”, *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, <<http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=fantastic>>. Accessed 17.6.2017

⁸ Manlove 159.

for a fantasy text to aim for a confusing or even scary unknown, quite the opposite.⁹ That way, the reader is able to form a positive relationship with the supernatural layer of the story. Manlove believes that fantasy narrative can be presented powerfully enough to provoke the audience's imagination in a way, which gives the story a measure of, albeit unverifiable, reality.¹⁰ Overall, the supernatural, imaginative aspect is emphasized in every definition of fantasy; in fact, the word itself originally comes from Latin 'phantasia', meaning imagination.

1.4 Fantasy, myths and religion

In the foreword to *Christian Mythmakers*, Rolland Hein says that the two most basic characteristics of a man, excluding the physicality, are "to know and to worship"¹¹. Later in the chapter, he adds imagination as a third characteristic necessary to make sense of reality, which is impossible to be comprehended merely through rationality. At the peak of imagination, Hein suggests, is the Myth.¹² As Tolkien puts it, imagination is closely related to fantasy; fantasy to him is a natural human activity, and imagination gives men the ability to consider "images of things that are not only "not actually present," but which are indeed not to be found in our primary world at all, or are generally believed not to be found there"¹³. Thus, imagination enables humans to actually comprehend and orient within the Secondary world in a fantasy narrative, which provides the "most appropriate context to mythic illuminations"¹⁴.

According to Hein, the nature of Myth is transcendental by definition, which provides the first point of the string of similarities and links between Myth and Christianity, and the reason why it often interconnects. In fact, Christianity in itself is a mythology of sorts; Hein

⁹ Manlove 157.

¹⁰ Manlove 158.

¹¹ Rolland Hein, *Christian Mythmakers* (Chicago: Cornerstone Press Chicago, 2002) 9.

¹² Hein 10.

¹³ John R.R Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories", *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1983) 139.

¹⁴ Hein 12.

reminds of how for many writers who were Christian, including Lewis and Tolkien, Christianity presented a mythology which became Truth and entered the historical reality.¹⁵ To Tolkien, the narrative of Christ's life and resurrection is the ultimate fairy story.¹⁶ After all, both Christianity and fairy tales – and by extension fantasy – require the recipient to believe in another world. Hein also makes sure to point out the role of symbols within both Christianity – from the early days of being a forbidden faith and resting on symbols to connect the members of the religion, through Middle Ages, in which imagery presented a way to teach the illiterate masses of the Biblical narrative – and fantasy. Bible is the “ultimate source for elemental images of Western literature”¹⁷, because the Anglo-Saxon society rests upon Christianity as a pillar. Therefore, the imagery registers of Western literary art, fantasy included, are often very similar to the Christian one. The themes of creation, fall and redemption, struggle or a calling repeat itself in the Bible as well as many fantasy narratives.¹⁸

¹⁵ Hein 11.

¹⁶ Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories” 155.

¹⁷ Hein 11.

¹⁸ Hein 11.

Chapter Two: Authors in context

2.1 Authors in context of the fantasy genre

2.1.1 J.R.R.Tolkien within fantasy

Much has been written about Tolkien as the ‘father of modern fantasy’ or one of the most important authors of the genre. Obviously, fantasy has been written long before he himself made any literary attempts; however, his position among other writers of fantasy is ground-breaking. Clute’s *Encyclopaedia* even calls *Lord of the Rings* ‘the most influential fantasy novel ever written.’¹⁹ Tolkien’s chief importance in the history of fantasy lies mainly in re-inventing high fantasy, effectively setting a new convention of the genre. *Lord of the Rings* was published mid-1950s and its uniquely created secondary world has become a template of sorts for many writers published afterwards, as it reached notoriety. Nowadays, whoever writes a fantasy narrative containing races such as elves, dwarves or orcs necessarily either takes inspiration from Tolkien, or deliberately tries to differentiate from his template. Tolkien’s way of creating a universe for his narrative provided a stepping stone for at least half a century of upcoming writers; his relentless attention to detail when it comes to history, languages or cultural specifics of the fictional world in particular.

Additionally, Tolkien made a major step in popularizing the genre, which he believed to be “a higher form of Art, indeed the most nearly pure form, and so (when achieved) the most potent”²⁰. As Tom Shippey points out in his entry for *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, while fantasy novels have been published way before it, the commercial success of *Lord of the Rings* was unprecedented²¹. Firstly, thanks to Tolkien,

¹⁹ “J.R.R.Tolkien”, *Encyclopaedia of Fantasy*, <http://sf-encyclopedia.uk/fe.php?nm=tolkien_j_r_r>. Accessed 17.6.2017.

²⁰ Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories” 139.

²¹ Tom Shippey, “Literature, Twentieth Century: Influence of Tolkien”, *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D.C. Drout (New York: Taylor&Francis Group, 2007) 379.

many of the readers of the trilogy became inspired to write similar stories on their own, be it fan sequels of Tolkien's books or their own original stories. Many of them have later become published authors of fantasy.²² He also reminded aspiring authors of how vast a source of inspiration Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse mythology can be, and that there are many archetypal characters and stories to tap into. Moreover, the success of *Lord of the Rings* brought the potential mainstream appeal of fantasy stories to the awareness of the publishing companies, who – in an attempt to re-create the sales of Tolkien's work – often gave a chance to the stories that would most likely not get printed before it. In that and many other ways, Tolkien helped re-invent genre that then steadily gain in popularity throughout the entire second half of the 20th century.

2.1.2 G.R.R.Martin within fantasy

One of those authors gaining from the popularity that Tolkien claimed for the genre was also George R.R. Martin. The first volume of *A Song of Ice and Fire, A Game of Thrones*, was published in 1996 – quite some time after the success of Tolkien's work. However, Martin admitted he “knew in a general sense [he] wanted to write an epic fantasy since [he] loved [J.R.R.] Tolkien since [he] was a kid.”²³ In that sense, Martin is a part of the abovementioned generation of authors inspired by Tolkien's model of a fantasy narrative. In the 1990s, fantasy was already a well-established, widely respected genre with a large audience. Much like many other fantasy writers, Martin draws a lot from Tolkien's mould of an epic fantasy narrative, such as the mechanics of creating a world to set his story into. In his own words, *A Song of Ice and Fire* takes place within “what Tolkien wrote was “the secondary world.” [...] Tolkien really pioneered that with Middle Earth.”²⁴ Martin admits

²² Shippey, 379.

²³ George R.R. Martin, Interview by James Hibberd. *Entertainment Weekly*, 12.11.2011. <<http://ew.com/article/2011/07/12/george-martin-talks-a-dance-with-dragons/>>, Accessed 15.7.2017.

²⁴ Hibberd, Interviewing Martin for *Entertainment Weekly*, <<http://ew.com/article/2011/07/12/george-martin-talks-a-dance-with-dragons/>>.

taking inspiration from Tolkien in many other aspects as well, including characterization, magnitude of his saga, or techniques of creating a plot, having the subplots of individual characters “fan out, then curve and come back together”²⁵.

However, unlike Tolkien, Martin doesn't take the bulk of his source inspiration from the old Anglo-Saxon mythology, but rather from medieval history; his work is called a ““kind of cross-genre/genre-bending” fiction that would ground the elements of Tolkien-like fantasy in solid historical realism²⁶. There have been many speculations on which particular historical figures or events the *Song of Ice and Fire* has been modelled after, and some of them Martin even admits to have been inspired by, such as the War of the Roses or the Civil War between Empress Matilda and King Stephen from medieval English history. In an introduction to a recent edition of *The Accursed Kings*, Martin claims to have taken inspiration from “the works of great historical novelists like Thomas B. Costain, Mika Waltari, Howard Pyle and Maurice Druon” equally as much as he does “from Tolkien, Vance, Howard, and the other fantasists who came before”²⁷, suggesting that he follows in the footsteps of the traditions of modern fantasy, while also incorporating actual historical themes. While the success of his novels has been majorly boosted by the HBO TV show based on *A Song of Ice and Fire*, this blend of traditions seems to work for Martin, as many have claimed his work to be “the greatest fantasy since Tolkien”²⁸.

²⁵ Hibberd, Interviewing Martin for *Entertainment Weekly*, <http://ew.com/article/2011/07/12/george-martin-talks-a-dance-with-dragons/>.

²⁶ Lily McNeill, *George R.R. Martin: A Biography*, (Hyperink INC, 2012) 6.

²⁷ George R.R.Martin, “Foreword”, *The Accursed Kings* by Maurice Druon, (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), re-published in *Huffington Post*, 26.3.2013, <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/26/george-rr-martins-inspiration_n_2945193.html>. Accessed 15.7.2017.

²⁸ Hibberd, Interviewing Martin for *Entertainment Weekly*, <<http://ew.com/article/2011/07/12/george-martin-talks-a-dance-with-dragons/>>.

2.1.3 Donaldson within fantasy

Much like Martin, Stephen Donaldson also admits to admiring Tolkien's work and confirms the credit of Tolkien popularizing the genre, claiming he "might never have tried to write fantasy if Tolkien hadn't taught [him] that fantasy was worth doing"²⁹. Donaldson's first trilogy of *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* was published in the latter half of 1970s, good twenty years after *The Lord of the Rings* and about the same amount of time before the publishing of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Donaldson's work bears many similarities to Tolkien in terms of characterization, creation of names, and exploration of similar themes. Christine Barkley calls him "a natural heir to Tolkien"³⁰, mainly because of the way Donaldson allegorically considers many of the real-world issues of his time in a similar way Tolkien did. She claims that Donaldson asks similar questions as Tolkien, but provides different answers, which brings on the differences in their narratives, such as the real world, which (unlike Tolkien) Donaldson brings to his novel in coexistence with the secondary one.

Tom Shippey broadens this argument; while the setting of the secondary worlds in *Thomas Covenant* and *The Lord of the Rings* might be similar, Tolkien's quest focuses more on the corruption of the world, while Donaldson is more interested in its healing.³¹ Tolkien brings up the theme of pollution of the world (which he heavily associates with industry), but Donaldson carries it out in detail, paying more attention to how to save the slowly decaying Land. But, according to Shippey, the most striking difference between the two lies in the main hero himself: Thomas Covenant is anything but a Tolkienian hero and bears almost no resemblance to them, except for what an unlikely hero he is. Moreover, the main focus of Tolkien's narrative is in the past of his world, whereas *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*

²⁹ Stephen Donaldson, Interview by Jonathan Bacon, *Fantasy Crossroads*, January 1979, <<http://www.stephenrdonaldson.com/fromtheauthor/page.php?Page=12>>. Accessed 20.7.2017.

³⁰ Christine Barkley, *Stephen R. Donaldson and the Modern Epic Vision: A Critical Study of the "Chronicles of Thomas Covenant"*, (Jefferson: Macfarlan&Company INC Publishers, 2009), Kindle edition, 29.

³¹ Shippey 380.

look to the future of the Land.³² Apart from that, Donaldson differs from Tolkien in many other aspects, but despite remaining highly individual, he is very often counted as one of the most important descendants of Tolkien.

2.2 Authors in context of Christianity

While it would be rather reductive and incomplete to claim that the influence of their Christian upbringing was the main driving force behind the three authors' writing, it cannot be doubted that Christianity had a considerable effect on both their lives and their fictional mythology.

2.2.1 J.R.R. Tolkien and Catholicism

Tolkien's biographer Humphrey Carpenter calls Tolkien's devotion to Catholic church complete, and also one of his strongest personality traits³³. John was born to Arthur and Mabel Tolkien in South Africa in 1892 and as per custom, he was baptized within a month of his birth³⁴. His father died four years after³⁵; therefore, Tolkien drew the early religious influence mainly from his mother. Mabel, in her widowhood, found solace in Christianity; despite her and the Tolkien's family's strong disagreement, she converted to Catholicism and also instilled the faith in her children³⁶. According to his mother's wishes, Tolkien briefly attended Catholic St Phillip's school in Edgabaston, although he got most of his elementary education in Birmingham's King Edward's. His childhood years spent with his mother were characterized not only by regular and frequent visits to Church, but also by the presence of

³² William A. Senior, *Stephen R. Donaldson's Chronicles of Thomas Covenant: Variations on the fantasy tradition* (Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1995) 64.

³³ Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Životopis*, trans. Stanislava Pošustová-Menšíková (Prague: Argo, 2017) 155.

³⁴ Carpenter 25.

³⁵ Carpenter 30.

³⁶ Carpenter 38.

Mabel's friend, Catholic priest Francis Xavier Morgan, his later legal guardian, whom Tolkien himself calls fondly his "second father"³⁷.

Both Mabel and father Francis influenced Tolkien's personal faith immensely, and he himself often credits his mother for "having been brought up (since I was eight) in a Faith that has nourished me [...] and that I owe to my mother, who clung to her conversion and died young, largely through the hardships of poverty resulting from it."³⁸ Mabel's strong affinity to Catholicism and determination to bring her children up to be Catholics despite the great ostracism from her relatives motivated Tolkien to cling to his Faith. He viewed his mother's suffering as "heroic"³⁹ and linked it with her death in his mind; thus, since Catholicism reminded him of her, he continued to practice it after her premature death in 1904, even though it would have been more practical to give it up and mend his relationship with relatives.⁴⁰ His affection and respect for Mabel and her memory turned into a very strong relationship with his Faith, and Tolkien remained loyal to it throughout his life. He insisted his wife Edith converted prior to their marriage⁴¹ and continued to be a "devout Roman Catholic"⁴² until his death, as his grandson Simon recalls.

2.2.2 G.R.R. Martin and Catholicism

George R.R. Martin's religious journey was quite the opposite of Tolkien's. Martin was born in 1948 in New Jersey to Raymond and Margaret Martin into a deeply Catholic community. Not much is known about the degree his early religious upbringing, but there is photographic evidence of him experiencing a traditional first communion available on his

³⁷ John R.R. Tolkien, "#332 To Michael Tolkien", *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, eds. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, e-book edition (HarperCollins Publisher, 2012).

³⁸ Tolkien, "#142 To Robert Murray, SJ", *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

³⁹ Tolkien, "#250 To Michael Tolkien", *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁴⁰ Carpenter 45.

⁴¹ Carpenter 88.

⁴² Simon Tolkien, "My Grandfather J.R.R. Tolkien", <http://www.simontolkien.com>, February 2003. <<http://www.simontolkien.com/mygrandfather.html>>. Accessed 3.7.2017.

official website managed by himself.⁴³ Furthermore, he claims to have adopted his third name ‘Richard’ at confirmation⁴⁴, which suggests standard Catholic practices were held at the Martin household. He attended a Catholic boy exclusive high school, Marist High.

In a recent interview, Martin called himself a “lapsed Catholic” and refers to his “leaving Catholicism”⁴⁵ when discussing rejecting values indoctrinated into him during childhood. Moreover, he considers himself atheist, or rather agnostic. Martin admits to being fascinated by spirituality, but mentions the ultimate clash of his desire to have faith and his rationality, which prevents him from devoting himself to it. Finally, he admits that it is impossible to escape the values one is exposed to in early years⁴⁶; therefore, even though he is no longer a practicing believer, he feels the influence of it on him.

2.2.3 Donaldson and Christianity

Donaldson, who is a contemporary to Martin, was born in 1947 in Ohio to James Donaldson and Mary Reeder, both practising Presbyterians. At the age of four, his parents moved to India, where Donaldson’s father worked as an orthopaedic missionary⁴⁷, and where Stephen stayed until the age of sixteen. Donaldson is very vocal about how growing up in the conditions and community of missionaries shaped his views; his attitude towards missionary work and the way it treats, diminishes and loathes the local cultures is rather disapproving⁴⁸.

⁴³ George R.R.Martin, “Life and Times”, <http://www.georgerrmartin.com> Official website, <<http://www.georgerrmartin.com/about-george/life-and-times/bayonne/>>. Accessed 10.7.2017

⁴⁴ Martin, “Life and Times”, <<http://www.georgerrmartin.com/about-george/life-and-times/bayonne/>>.

⁴⁵ Hibberd, Interviewing Martin for *Entertainment Weekly*, <<http://ew.com/article/2011/07/12/george-martin-talks-a-dance-with-dragons/>>.

⁴⁶ Hibberd, Interviewing Martin for *Entertainment Weekly*, <<http://ew.com/article/2011/07/12/george-martin-talks-a-dance-with-dragons/>>.

⁴⁷ Stephen R. Donaldson, “6.8.2004”, *Gradual interview*, personal interview with the fans, www.stephenrdonaldson.com Official website, <http://www.stephenrdonaldson.com/fromtheauthor/gi_view.php>. Accessed 25.6.2017.

⁴⁸ Donaldson, “15.5.2004”, *Gradual interview*.

He claims to feel the “Western guilt” over his father’s involvement and missionary work in general to a point where he would avoid going back to India again⁴⁹.

In many interviews with his readers, Donaldson mentions being drawn away from the faith he was raised in, and openly talks about his displeasure with practices of the church, purposely calling the community of his youth “the Christian fundamentalists” and his childhood among them an “artificial reality”⁵⁰. This very strongly suggests, that he is no longer subjected to any form of organized Christian church. He confesses to feeling a certain animosity against Christianity, but specifies it to the organized religion and its authoritative and controlling nature, not the individual spiritual belief; mostly, he puts blame for this view to the environment of his upbringing and his real-life experience of what he calls “the judgmental, abusive, and even murderous forms which organized religions often take when they practice evangelism”⁵¹. Overall, Donaldson refuses to discuss his current religious beliefs; however, he mentions that Christianity is “bred in his bones”, quoting Flannery O’Connor on people being defined by what they attempt to run away from as much as what they gravitate towards⁵². He claims that “[his] conscious mind no longer lives in that world: [his] unconscious does what it wills”⁵³, clearly admitting the continuous influence of Christianity on him.

⁴⁹ Donaldson, “7.8.2004”, *Gradual Interview*.

⁵⁰ Donaldson, “21.3.2005“, *Gradual Interview*.

⁵¹ Donaldson, “11.4.2007”, *Gradual Interview*.

⁵² Donaldson, “8.6.2006”, *Gradual Interview*.

⁵³ Donaldson, “8.6.2006”, *Gradual Interview*.

Chapter 3: J.R.R. Tolkien

The Lord of the Rings' narrative doesn't explicitly contain any sort of organized religion or overt presence of any particular God; its Christian nature is undisputable, but more internal.

3.1 The Christian nature of *The Lord of the Rings*

Peter Kreeft brings to light Flannery O'Connor's quote about what defines a Christian novel; it is, he says, not "a novel about Christianity, Christians, or a Christian world, but "one in which the truth as Christians know it has been used as a light to see the world by"⁵⁴. This quote fits the Christian motive in *The Lord of the Rings* entirely, seeing as there are no forms of organized religion in the story, but Christian values and concepts can be observed in the narrative quite clearly; in fact, Kreeft calls it a "powerful example of an implicit religion"⁵⁵. Tolkien ultimately believed, that "Myth and fairy-story must, as all art, reflect and contain in solution elements of moral and religious truth (or error), but not explicit, not in the known form of the primary 'real' world"⁵⁶. In a letter to Robert Murray, Tolkien himself admits that "The Lord of the Rings is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision." Tolkien further describes having deliberately refrained from putting any sort of religion or cult practices in his imaginary world, because "the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism"⁵⁷. He explains that the absence of churches or religious ceremonies is simply "a part of the historical climate depicted", because the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* is supposed to

⁵⁴ Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), Kindle edition, Kindle Locations 868-870.

⁵⁵ Kreeft Kindle Locations 514-516.

⁵⁶ Tolkien, "#131 To Milton Waldman", *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁵⁷ Both: Tolkien, "#142 To Robert Murray, SJ", *Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

take place in pre-Christian era, in a world of a monotheistic “natural theology”⁵⁸. He continues to elaborate that this way of enriching the story with Christian elements was not consciously planned on his part, but that he owes it to being brought up in the Faith, as mentioned in chapter 2. Tolkien’s term for his own artistic composition is actually „subcreation“, because he feels that he creates within what the ultimate Creator already made⁵⁹.

However, the presence of Christian motives in *The Lord of the Rings* is not an allegory of religious ideas⁶⁰, as Tolkien claims to dislike “the conscious and intentional allegory”⁶¹, but more in the form of the God’s Providence. *The Philosophy of Tolkien* mentions, that out of the two ways in which God can act, miracles don’t happen in *The Lord of the Rings*, but the presence of Providence is very pervasive.⁶² In fact, many of the characters, such as Frodo, act as the instruments of Providence, and the plot is filled with providential designs as well. When Frodo can’t carry the Ring any further at the Mount Doom, “The Other Power then took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself)”⁶³ Similarly, Frodo realizes his own insufficiency for the quest to Mordor, but his implicit trust in Providence prompts him to carry the Ring anyway, and even volunteer to do it⁶⁴.

3.2 Content: The Concept of Good and Evil

Both the concepts of Good and Evil in *The Lord of the Rings* stem partly from Christian roots and the Christian morals and are traceable in them. The traits of characters that

⁵⁸ Tolkien, “#165 To Houghton Mifflin Co”, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁵⁹ Hein 182.

⁶⁰ Tolkien, “#211 To Rhona Beare”, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁶¹ Tolkien, “#131 To Milton Waldman”, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁶² Kreeft Kindle Locations 711-712.

⁶³ Tolkien, “#192 From a Letter to Amy Ronald”, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁶⁴ Kreeft Kindle Locations 514-516.

are considered Good or Evil often coincide with those deemed positive or negative in Christian theology.

3.2.1 The Origins of Evil

Tolkien establishes fairly clearly, that in the world of *The Lord of the Rings*, nothing and no one is created inherently evil. Even the orcs, servants of the enemy, have not been born such; “the Shadow that bred the can only mock, it cannot make. [...] it only ruined them and twisted them”⁶⁵. Similarly, the Ringwraiths used to be noble men, and Sauron used to be a being of Valinor before their shift towards evil.⁶⁶ According to the mechanics of Tolkien’s world, every being is therefore created if not inherently good, then at least morally neutral. To become evil, the characters must be corrupted by an external source, various corruptive forces. Similarly, Genesis teaches that the world has been created as a paradise and the humans in it were inherently Good, because they have been made in God’s own image⁶⁷, and the original sin has been brought to the world with the corruption of men by a serpent⁶⁸.

3.2.2 Power as the Main Corruptive Force

The corruptive forces which tempt the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* are several, but the most prominent one is power. Tolkien shows power to be an immensely dangerous temptation; for each and every character, it takes a different form. Sauron, the main force of evil in the trilogy, is the most powerful spirit, and therefore deals in absolutes, desiring the highest form of it; he wishes to be a “God-King” and demands “absolute temporal power over the whole world”⁶⁹. The orcs as his servants are bred (by him, and earlier in the narratives preceding *The Lord of the Rings* by his master Morgoth) with an intent to usurp the power of

⁶⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the Kings*, (HarperCollins ebooks, 2008) 1195.

⁶⁶ Tolkien, “#131 To Milton Waldman”, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*

⁶⁷ Genesis 1.27.

⁶⁸ Genesis 3.1-15.

⁶⁹ Tolkien, “#183 Notes on W. H. Auden's review of *The Return of the King*”, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

creation through a “tyrannous re-forming”⁷⁰; this power is supposed to be reserved only for the deity. Similarly, the Ringwraiths took the nine Rings from Sauron in order to rise above their stations and their power corrupted them and enslaved them to Sauron’s will; one of the abilities of all of the Rings was the enhancement of the natural powers of their bearers, which Tolkien calls “easily corruptible into evil, a lust for domination”⁷¹. The One Ring itself, which is implied to have a will of its own and almost becomes a character in the story, is sometimes called the Ring of Power – its power of lust was “so great, that anyone who used it became mastered by it”⁷². The danger within the Ring is openly stated many times in the trilogy, the Ring being called “perilous” or “dangerous”⁷³.

Most characters considered “good” in *The Lord of the Rings* become tempted by the power through an appeal to their good intentions. Saruman originally desires enhanced personal power for this reason exactly; he believes that his own will could overpower the Ring, that he could control it and use its powers for good⁷⁴. Similarly, Boromir - and by extension also his father Denethor - believe, that they should take the Ring for themselves and use it to fight Sauron and defeat him⁷⁵. The intentions of all three come from a good place with the idea of getting rid of evil; however, their fault is in being too proud to actually believe that their wills could take over the Ring’s Power. In their self-assurance, they are proud enough to assume they know the correct way to the “good”. Using the Ring for good purposes seems, from their perspective, “reasonable and proper, [but] it is insidiously wrong, because the good is unknowable to all wisdom but [the God’s]”⁷⁶. By believing they know

⁷⁰ Hein 190.

⁷¹ Tolkien, “#131 To Milton Waldman”, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁷² Tolkien, “#131 To Milton Waldman”, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁷³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, (HarperCollins e-books, 2008) 61.

⁷⁴ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 338.

⁷⁵ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 519.

⁷⁶ Hein 197.

what is “good” and how to achieve it, they commit the sin of pride, which ultimately brings all of them to their ends.

Analogically, in the Biblical narrative, the sin of lust or desire is often mentioned, as lust for power, domination, worldly riches, or a wife of another man, e.g. in the tales of David and Bathsheba or that of the queen Jezebel. Such a desire is always shown to be destructive for the person who suffers from it, and leads to God’s displeasure. Similarly, pride is listed among the seven deadly sins, which are “perverse habits which darken the conscience and incline one to evil”⁷⁷. Tolkien follows the simple biblical formula: “each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death”⁷⁸, which resonates through the narrative.

3.2.3 The Virtues of Good: Resistance to Temptation

Christine Barkley reminds, that in Tolkien’s world, the solution to the story must depend on “the virtues of the characters and not a cheap magic trick or device. [...] For him heroics cannot be connected to power or magic but must come from strengths of personality”⁷⁹. Since in the world of *The Lord of the Rings*, power corrupts the characters to evil, the ability to resist its temptation is one of the core traits in characters considered to be Good. This ability is generally linked with wisdom: wisdom to realize the temptation and to uncover the Ring’s intention. Much like Saruman, Gandalf and Galadriel are also tempted by the power of the Ring. To Gandalf, who has always strived to keep the world of Middle-Earth out of Sauron’s influence and has worked tirelessly against him, the Ring presents itself as a

⁷⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, online archives < http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html>. 398. Accessed 20.7.2017.

⁷⁸ James 1:14-15

⁷⁹ Barkley 30.

way to achieve this and do Good. However, when Frodo offers him to take the Ring, Gandalf reacts very strongly: “Do not tempt me! [...] Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. [...] I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused. The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength”⁸⁰. Gandalf is wise enough to be weak, to understand his heart and its weaknesses, to know how the Ring operates and to realize how dangerous succumbing to the calling of the Ring would be. He lacks the sinful pride, and his self-doubt and humility actually save him from making the mistake of the too self-assured Saruman. Similarly, when Galadriel is offered the Ring, she fights the temptation but ultimately overcomes it. Her struggle is described very vividly; she seems to Frodo “tall beyond measurement, and beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful”⁸¹. But she is wise and experienced enough to recognize the temptation as a test, and therefore able to see through it and resist.

The direct contrast to Boromir’s pride is the behaviour of his younger brother Faramir. He is faced with an identical choice, maybe even in a stronger position than Boromir, with “two halflings, and a host of men at [his] call, and the Ring of Rings. A pretty stroke of fortune!” But unlike Boromir, Faramir’s instinctive wisdom (for his knowledge comes from different sources than Gandalf’s) doesn’t allow him to take the Ring, as he is “wise enough to know that there are some perils from which a man must flee”⁸².

In the Bible, the ability to resist temptation is praised many times, most notably in the example of Jesus being tempted by the Devil during his 40 days in the desert. Moreover, the Lord’s Prayer that he teaches to his followers contains the verse “and lead us not into

⁸⁰ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 81.

⁸¹ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* 476.

⁸² Both: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, (HarperCollins e-books, 2008) 890.

temptation, but deliver us from evil”⁸³; the Lord’s Prayer is the most crucial one in the whole Christian Catechism, which clearly indicates the importance of the resistance to temptation in the Christian theology.

3.2.4 The Virtues of Good: Self-Sacrifice

Wisdom and humility prevent the characters of *The Lord of The Rings* from succumbing to the temptation of evil; however, it does not provide the edge in the fight to destroy it. In *Christian mythmakers*, Rolland Hein speaks of the nature of heroism that is needed to defeat Sauron, and suggests that it “lies not in acquisition, great physical prowess, or great cunning, but in self-abnegation and renunciation. All personal advantage must be denied, all personal aggrandizement forsaken, all sacrifices must be made”⁸⁴. In this sense, the willingness to self-sacrifice again ties in with humility; it is necessary to cast away the selfishness and self-preservation in order to bring the ultimate sacrifice.

Within the books, many characters have to make a sacrifice in order to help the forces of Good to defeat Evil. Gandalf sacrifices himself in the mines of Moria, to allow the rest of the Fellowship to continue, and for that, he is rewarded and returned enhanced, with greater power and greater wisdom. But the main sacrifice in the trilogy is Frodo’s: however important the battles and military achievements of other characters, Frodo’s mission is the one which decides the fate of Middle-Earth. Frodo spends himself entirely, his suffering – both physical and mental thanks to the power of the Ring – is greater than any other character’s, and both he and Samwise know that the quest will cost them their lives⁸⁵; yet they continue it. They bring the ultimate sacrifice and in the end, it is mercy, another great Christian virtue, that saves

⁸³ *Catechism*, “Common Prayers”, http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html>.

⁸⁴ Hein 191.

⁸⁵ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 1221.

them from failing: Bilbo's and Frodo's mercy to Glum, which kept him alive to fulfil his final role at Mount Doom.

For Christianity, the self-sacrifice serves as the central pillar; the narrative of the New Testament is mainly concerned with Christ's sacrifice for humanity. Frodo's quote: "It must often be so, Sam, when things are in danger: some one has to give them up, lose them, so that others may keep them."⁸⁶ is thus deeply Christian in itself and alludes to Christ taking on himself the sins of humans and making the ultimate sacrifice by dying on the Cross.

3.2.5 The Power of Atonement

Another character who sacrifices their life for the others to be able to advance the quest is Boromir. The reader witnesses the character of Boromir yield to the temptations of the power of the Ring and subsequently fall to evil: he even physically attacks Frodo and prompts his decision to break the Fellowship and continue alone with Sam. However, unlike Saruman, whose pride is too great for any atonement, Boromir is "only stubborn and weak, and repents"⁸⁷. The end of Boromir's life illustrates one of the most important motives in the entire development of characters and their movement on the imaginary scale between Good and Evil: that personal atonement has the ability to redeem a person that was lead to evil. Boromir's penance comes very shortly after the scene between himself and Frodo and shows that unlike Saruman, Boromir is not truly succumbed to evil, only temporarily blinded by the desire of Ring and its power. He repents by employing the aforementioned virtue of self-sacrifice; when the Fellowship is attacked by the orcs sent by Saruman, Boromir fights to save Merry and Pippin from them and eventually sacrifices his life. "I tried to take the Ring from Frodo," he said. 'I am sorry. I have paid.'⁸⁸, he says to Aragorn just moments before his death,

⁸⁶ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 1346.

⁸⁷ Kreeft Kindle Locations 2790-2793.

⁸⁸ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 538.

suggesting that he is aware of the error of his ways and regrets it. Because he repents and is willing to make a sacrifice, he is allowed a heroic death.

Christian theology also considers atonement one of the most important aspects of the life of the faithful; in fact, it is one of the seven sacraments⁸⁹. Christian penance can take many forms, one of which is confession – when Boromir admits trying to take the Ring from Frodo to Aragorn, it is his own form of confession. By confessing this sin which was committed out of power-lust, Boromir acknowledges his mistake and therefore is forgiven, as the "confession of serious sins is the only ordinary way to obtain forgiveness"⁹⁰. As another example, Tolkien mentions, that even Sauron, who is the main enemy in *The Lord of the Rings*, was "given an opportunity of repentance" in previous narratives, but "could not face the humiliation of recantation, and suing for pardon; and so his temporary turn to good and 'benevolence' ended in a greater relapse, until he became the main representative of Evil of later ages"⁹¹. By this, Tolkien suggests that even a character so deeply fallen into evil as Sauron would be "forgiven" and counted as Good again, if he were to repent. Thus, penance is shown to have the strongest value in the world of *The Lord of the Rings*, and neither being considered Good nor Evil is definitive.

3.3 Form: The Language of Worship

"There are [...] no temples or 'churches' or fanes in this 'world' among 'good' peoples. They had little or no 'religion' in the sense of worship"⁹². It has already been established, that Tolkien refrained from including any overt religion in *The Lord of the Rings*. However, some language of worship is still utilized by some of the characters.

⁸⁹ *Catechism*, 224.

⁹⁰ *Catechism*, 304.

⁹¹ Tolkien, "#153 To Peter Hastings (draft)", *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

⁹² Tolkien, "#153 To Peter Hastings (draft)", note fn33, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

Out of the Valar, the characters that might be considered deities, which are present in narratives chronologically preceding *The Lord of the Rings* (such as *The Silmarillion*, the scope of which is too great to be analysed here), only one is occasionally mentioned within the text of the trilogy: Elbereth, or Varda, lady of the Stars and the Queen of Valar.

3.3.1 Lack of direct worship

In the *Philosophy of Tolkien*, Peter Kreeft point out that “The absence of temples, rites, and ceremonies does not make *The Lord of the Rings* nonreligious, but there is one religious act whose absence does seem to make *The Lord of the Rings* nonreligious. That act is prayer.”⁹³ The absence of prayer effectively eliminates any direct relationship between man and God; thus, Valar as a deity are not actively included into the narrative.

However, Elbereth, as a member of Valar, is sometimes called upon in an invocation; her name is used almost exclusively by elves, sometimes Aragorn, and also Frodo and Bilbo. Elves are naturally familiar with Elbereth, since some of them, who have been to the Blessed Realm during the events prior to *The Lord of the Rings*, have actually met her. Aragorn was raised in Rivendell⁹⁴ among elves, and as for Frodo, it is established that he received an education in those matters from Bilbo, who was his guardian; he also knows the language of the elves, which is uncommon for a hobbit⁹⁵. Tolkien addresses those invocations in one of his letters: “For help they may call on a Vala (as Elbereth), as a Catholic might on a Saint, though no doubt knowing in theory as well as he that the power of the Vala was limited and derivative. But this is a ‘primitive age’: and these folk may be said to view the Valar as children view their parents or immediate adult superiors, and though they know they are subjects of the King, he does not live in their country nor have there any dwelling”⁹⁶. The

⁹³ Kreeft Kindle Locations 874-875.

⁹⁴ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 1386.

⁹⁵ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 111.

⁹⁶ Tolkien, “#153 To Peter Hastings (draft)”, note fn33, *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

only person using Elbereth's other name, Varda, is Galadriel, who is also the only elf the audience encounters, who is known to have been in Valinor and met the Vala personally. The invocations are always directly addressing her.

3.3.2 The invocations: Power of a holy name

Since Frodo is the character which the text is the most concerned with, his mentions of Elbereth are the most frequent. When he does, it largely doesn't seem to be in order to ask for help from Elbereth; nevertheless, it is suggested that the name itself spoken out loud brings him comfort and a sense of courage. When confronted with the Ringwraiths on the Weathertop, he uses her name as a battle cry to encourage himself to strike the Black Rider – “he heard himself crying aloud: O Elbereth! Gilthoniel! At the same time, he struck at the feet of his enemy.”⁹⁷. Similarly, Samwise picks up on this habit and sometimes says Elbereth's name out loud, as if to ground himself and get some comfort, such as when he searches for Frodo in Cirith Ungol (“Gilthoniel! A Elbereth! And then his tongue was loosed and his voice cried in a language which he did not know [...] And with that he staggered to his feet and was Samwise the hobbit, Hamfast's son, again.”⁹⁸).

The usage of Elbereth's name generally seems to have no 'magical' power on its own, neither does it perform any miracles other than drawing out the courage that is already hidden within the invoker. However, it does have a certain sense of holiness associated with it, as the servants of Sauron in the story tend to turn away from it – sometimes even seem hurt by it. In Cirith Ungol, Frodo and Sam use 'Elbereth' as a signal, because “No orc would say that.”⁹⁹, implying it is uncomfortable for the orcs in some way. The story does not elaborate on whether they are unable to say the name, or simply choose not to. The Ringwraiths, who are

⁹⁷ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 256.

⁹⁸ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 954.

⁹⁹ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 1194.

higher in the rank of Sauron's evil minions, are even more sensitive to the name of Elbereth; when Frodo strikes the Black Rider with his sword and calls on her, it seems to have some sort of effect. Aragorn observes that "it is unharmed, but all blades perish that pierce that dreadful King. More deadly to him was the name of Elbereth"¹⁰⁰. This suggests that when invoked, Elbereth (or any other Valar) do not directly interfere or help the character, but their name itself has an ability to either lift up the invoker, or scare – and even harm to an unspecified degree – the enemy.

On the other hand, elves use Elbereth's name as more of a memento, mostly on the occasions involving nostalgia. Elves of the Third Age sense the end of their time and arrival of the Age of Men¹⁰¹, and often remind themselves of the Blessed Realm beyond the sea and those who dwell there.

3.3.3 Hymns: Elbereth and Virgin Mary

Often when elves mention Elbereth, it is in a form of a song or a hymn. When Frodo first encounters elves in the story – when meeting Gildor Inglorion's company – he and his friends hear them sing a hymn for Elbereth. However, the song is not a form of a prayer in a way that can be seen in Martin's book in upcoming chapters; it is more of a praise of the Lady of the Stars, listing many of her titles and abilities. Later on, Frodo hears another song for Elbereth in Rivendell, and Bilbo implies that singing to her is a common practice among Rivendell elves.¹⁰² In the past, many critics have asserted, that "the invocations of Elbereth, [...] were clearly related to Catholic devotion to Mary."¹⁰³ This is mainly because Elbereth is the most important female character close to being a deity, and is often invoked when someone's heart needs courage or gentle kindness and comfort; similarly, Mary is known in

¹⁰⁰ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 258.

¹⁰¹ Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 1290.

¹⁰² Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 310.

¹⁰³ Tolkien, "#213 From a Letter to Deborah Webster", *The Letter of J.R.R. Tolkien*.

the Christian theology for gentleness associated with motherhood and is called upon for intercession.

Additionally, Christian prayer to Mary, “Hail Holy Queen”, contains a verse “To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve. / To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears!”¹⁰⁴. This is strikingly similar to the sentiment of Gildor Inglorion’s company singing to Elbereth from the position of the banished children: “O Elbereth! Gilthoniel! / We still remember, we who dwell / In this far land beneath the trees, / Thy starlight on the Western Seas.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Catechism*, “Common prayers”. <
http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 104.

Chapter 4: George R.R. Martin

The world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* contains many countries and nations, and therefore, naturally, also many religions. One of those, dominant within the continent of Westeros, is The Faith of Seven, sometimes also referred to as The Faith or ‘new gods’ as opposed to the ‘old gods’ worshipped mainly in the North.

4.1 The Faith of Seven: Basic information

The nickname ‘new gods’ stems from the origins of the Faith in Westeros. The religion was brought from the northwest of Essos with the invasion of the Andals, one of the three ethnic ancestors of current Westeros’ inhabitants.¹⁰⁶ Just as Andals – more evolved as a culture – pushed out or assimilated the native inhabitants, the Faith of the Seven replaced the worship of ‘old gods’ in most parts of Westeros.

The Faith worships a single God with Seven faces or Seven personas, also called “the Seven Who Are One”¹⁰⁷: The Father, The Mother, The Maiden, The Crone, The Warrior, The Smith and The Stranger; consequently, the symbol of the Faith is a star with seven points. The deity is worshipped in seven-walled septs, in which each aspect of the God has its own wall dedicated to it with an altar or an artistic depiction of the deity¹⁰⁸. The most holy of them are the Great Sept of Baelor in the King’s Landing, the capitol of The Seven Kingdoms, and the Starry Sept in Old Town, the original seat of The Faith. The Church is highly organized; the hierarchy of the Faith begins with septons and septas as the people who devoted their lives to the Faith of The Seven. Above them stands the council of the Most Devout, the highest ranking septons, who elect the High Septon, the head of the Church¹⁰⁹. Some of the followers

¹⁰⁶ George R.R. Martin, “Tyrion”, *A Dance with Dragons*, (Harper Voyager ebooks, 2012) 87.

¹⁰⁷ George R.R. Martin, “Cersei”, *A Feast for Crows*, (Harper Voyager ebooks, 2010) 332.

¹⁰⁸ George R.R. Martin, “Catelyn”, *A Clash of Kings*, (Harper Voyager ebooks, 2002) 309.

¹⁰⁹ Martin, “Cersei”, *A Feast for Crows*, 327.

of the Faith also unite in several monk communities, beggar orders, or the military arm of the Faith, such as the Faith Militant. The religious doctrines are summed up in a number of holy books, of which the most crucial is *The Seven-Pointed Star*¹¹⁰.

Although the political rule of the Seven Kingdoms is secular, the Faith has influenced the morals, the culture, and by extension also the ethics and system of laws in Westeros. The values held by the Faith are then often also officially supported by the law, such as the prohibition of slavery, polygamous marriages or incest¹¹¹. Septons also officiate ceremonies recognized by the law, such as marriages or anointing of the kings. Due to the position of the Faith of the Seven within the lives of people, the High Septon and high ranking septons and septas can have significant political power and influence the affairs of the Crown.

4.2 The Development of The Faith of Seven as a fictional religion

The Faith of the Seven is only one of the many religions that audience comes across within *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and Martin admits a real-life inspiration behind most of the more important and more developed ones. He claims that his general philosophy for creating a fantasy world is about “root[ing] it in reality” and then “tweaking it or expanding it a little”, adding imaginative elements¹¹². Martin believes that grounding the facts of his secondary world in reality gives it more credibility, “certain verisimilitude, plausibility”, which would be way more difficult to achieve with religions without any connection to reality¹¹³.

¹¹⁰ Martin, “Jaime”, *A Feast for Crows*, 353.

¹¹¹ Martina, “Davos”, *A Clash of Kings*, 101.

¹¹² George R.R. Martin, Interview by John Hodgman for *The Sound of Young America*, www.maximumfun.org, 19.9.2011, <<http://www.maximumfun.org/sound-young-america/george-r-r-martin-author-song-ice-and-fire-series-interview-sound-young-america-interview>>. Accessed 30.7.2017.

¹¹³ George R.R. Martin, Interview by Dan Anthony, @Talks at Google, “George R.R. Martin | Talks at Google”, Online video clip, [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTTW8M_etko), 6.8.2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTTW8M_etko>. 46:45. Accessed 31.7.2017. Transcript of the question used: “The major religions that actually play a significant role in the story are somewhat based on real religion or real religious systems, Although I don’t believe in just doing a one to one transformation where I’m gonna take like, Islam and file off the serial numbers and call it Mislam or something and pretend it’s the same. I take certain tenants of the religions, but I maybe take part of this and part of that and I melt them together and I think about it and I add a few imaginative elements. [...] The faith of The Seven is very loosely modelled on the medieval Catholic Church, but again with different elements. I mean of course the Catholic Church,

Martin names medieval Catholic church as his main inspiration for the Church of Seven and its hierarchies in many interviews, and admits to have based some of its doctrines around the Christian ones¹¹⁴. However, it would be reductive to declare them to be a direct parallel, as Martin borrows many aspects from other religions as well.

4.3 Content: The similarities of Christianity and Faith of the Seven

4.3.1 The Holy Trinity and The Seven

The central doctrine of the Faith of the Seven is the unity of seven aspects of one deity. The concept of a single deity with multiple aspects clearly corresponds with the trinity of a Christian God, who consists of three personas as well: The Father, The Son, and The Holy Ghost. As opposed to that, the Seven also include a feminine aspect; three of the facets – the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone – are feminine, three – the Father, the Smith and the Warrior – are masculine, and the seventh – the Stranger, representing Death – is carefully androgynous, containing both masculine and feminine elements. Each of the personas of The Seven is responsible for a different aspect of an everyday life and therefore is addressed in worship by the praying believers according to the circumstances; for example, the Father rules over Justice, whereas the Warrior would be prayed to for courage and victory, and the Mother is asked for mercy or safety of loved ones. This concept of a deity responsible for a specific sector mostly resembles a Greek pantheon of Gods with different

which I was—I'm no longer a practicing Catholic, but that was how I was born and raised, you know, has the whole concept, the heart of the Trinity, which was, you know, explained to me, well, as it's three but it's also one, you know, which kids can never get. It's like, „OK, we have three gods.“ „No no. You don't have three gods. You have one God. He has three, you know, parts.“ „OK.“ So we don't have three. We just have one. It's like the the shamrock that was held, you know, the three-leaf clover. So, I did that except I made it seven instead of three, I have the whole where we have the seven gods, we have seven personas, instead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we have Maiden Mother and Crone, which of course I took from Paganism as the traditional female thing. I kind of hobbled the male side together and then i added the Stranger as the God of death, who is also the centre of the cult of the Faceless Men. [...] So my faith with its hierarchies, its High Septon and its Septs and its orders of, you know, essentially monks and priests and so forth is loosely based on Catholicism. [...] This is my general philosophy, I think, for fantasy, is, you know, base it in reality, but then get a little imaginative to it and rework the elements and put this with that and add you own, your own touch to it. And, but the grounding it in reality, I think, give it a certain verisimilitude, plausibility, where just entirely made-up religions that are unconnected to anything, it's much more difficult to make them plausible.”

¹¹⁴ Martin, Interview by John Hodgman for *The Sound of Young America*.

specializations; the Christian Trinity is described more as three very closely interlinked manifestations of the same deity, “distinct from one another in their relations of origin: “It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds.””¹¹⁵. According to Linda Woodhead’s *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction*, the Father is he “who dwells in Heaven”, the Son is he who “came down to earth to save us” and the Holy Spirit is “God’s presence in the world – and in the hearth of the believer”¹¹⁶ In Catholic Christianity, the role of different personas to worship for different outcomes falls to the saints, who each have patronage over a specific area.

One of the important concepts Martin has taken from the Holy Trinity to the Faith of Seven is the difficulty to grasp such a complex theological issue as a multi-unity of God. In *A Feast for Crows*, septon Meribald mentions that “the mystery of the Seven Who Are One is not easy for simple folk to grasp, and I am nothing if not simple, so I speak of seven gods”¹¹⁷ In an interview for Google, Martin points this complexity as puzzling and mentions how it stood out to him among other Christian doctrines internalized by him as a child due to the Catholic upbringing. Martin mentions being taught of the Trinity with a parallel of a three-leaf clover as one shamrock; similarly, Catelyn Stark recalls the parallel of seven walls forming a single building of a sept, just like the seven aspects are one God.¹¹⁸

4.3.2 Hierarchy and secular power

Apart from the central doctrine, the Faith of the Seven also takes some inspiration from Catholicism when it comes to hierarchy of the Church. The network of septons closely resembles traditional Catholic priesthood in terms of duties. Just like priests, septons lead the practices of worship, have the authority to forgive the sinners or perform marriage ceremonies

¹¹⁵ *Catechism*, 254.

¹¹⁶ Linda Woodhead, *Christianity: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 42.

¹¹⁷ Martin, “Brienne”, *A Feast for Crows*, 294.

¹¹⁸ Martin, “Catelyn”, *A Clash of Kings*, 309.

and last rites. They usually belong with a specific sept, but in the less populated areas, travelling septons often take on those duties¹¹⁹, similarly as the medieval priests would. Moreover, the group of Most Devout electing the High Septon parallels the conclave of cardinals; the only difference being Martin's inclusion of women in it.

The position of the High Septon himself is fairly similar to the Catholic head of Church, the pope. He is usually elected from the midst of the Most Devout and after ascension, the High Septon is expected to give up the worldly riches and leave behind his secular name as a symbol of becoming the avatar of the Gods¹²⁰. Taking a different name upon becoming a pope has also been a common practice of Catholic pope for many centuries.

On the personas of the Pope and the High Septon also depends the secular power of the Church.¹²¹ Because the Faith of the Seven is so deeply rooted in the spiritual lives of the commoners, they view the rituals performed by it as highly important. As a performer of those, the members of the Church of the Seven have a certain amount of influence over the politics of Westeros, as Cersei knows: "The blessing was an empty ritual, she knew, but rituals and ceremonies had power in the eyes of the ignorant. Aegon the Conqueror himself had dated the start of his realm from the day the High Septon anointed him in Oldtown."¹²² The struggle for power between the Church and the Crown are visible in the saga, especially from *A Feast for Crows* onwards; likewise, they also take up a big part of the medieval history of the Catholic Church, such as the fight for the right of investiture.

Apart from the highest position, the lowest ranks of the Church also appear in the saga; the monk orders of Christianity are represented in *A Song of Ice and Fire* in several

¹¹⁹ Martin, "Brienne", *A Feast for Crows*, 293.

¹²⁰ Martin, "Cersei", *A Feast for Crows*, 327.

¹²¹ George R.R. Martin, "Direwolves and the Seven", *Correspondence with fans*, personal interview, [www.westeros.org](http://www.westeros.org/Citadel/SSM/Entry/1185/) Official affiliated website, <<http://www.westeros.org/Citadel/SSM/Entry/1185/>>. Accessed 2.7.2017.

¹²² Martin, "Cersei", *A Feast for Crows*, 329.

different ways. There are several types of orders with different ranking amongst the people devoted to the Gods, military orders being one of them. Martin admits to having loosely based the Warrior Sons and the Faith Militant on the medieval crusading orders¹²³ serving as an armed hand of the Church. Others are for example beggar brotherhoods such as The Poor Fellows¹²⁴, who in some aspects resemble the begging order of Benedictines. Overall, the ideas of asceticism and almsgiving are considered a virtue among both believers of the Faith of the Seven and Christianity. All throughout the series, Baelor the Blessed – the most pious, ascetic and Gods obeying of the kings - is mentioned as the most holy king of the Seven Kingdoms, whose example is held in high regard¹²⁵. Similarly, in Medieval Anglo-Saxon society, piety was considered a highly esteemed and desirable virtue in a king. Likewise, the giving of alms is common in both Christianity and the Faith of Seven, as a practice in which rich believers donate money or other riches to those in need or to the Church¹²⁶ in order to repent for their sins and receive Gods' forgiveness through prayers of those who were gifted.

4.3.3 Corrupted Church and forms of religious revival

The aspect of militant asceticism becomes especially important in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, when the order of the Sparrows comes to power via the High Septon being elected from their ranks. With these events, Martin took inspiration not only from the hierarchy and organization of the Catholic Church, but also from some chapters of its long history. The concept of very corrupted members of Church focusing on interfering with secular politics more than on the actual matters of Faith is very familiar to the Catholic Church of the late Middle Ages. Moreover, Martin draws from many religious reformative movements that were often born at the time in reaction to the Church's debauchery. Those movements often

¹²³ Martin, "Faith Militant's Inspiration and Ice and Fire Dream Cast", *Correspondence with fans*, <<http://www.westeros.org/Citadel/SSM/Entry/2765>>.

¹²⁴ Martin, "Cersei", *A Feast for Crows*, 336.

¹²⁵ Martin, "Sansa", *A Storm of Sword*, 548.

¹²⁶ Martin, "Cersei," *A Feast for Crows*, 332.

emphasized the importance of returning to the austerity of the early Church and focusing on the holy books and the Faith itself. In one of his interviews on the matter, Martin says: “If you look at the history of the church in the Middle Ages, you had periods where you had very worldly and corrupt popes and bishops. People who were not spiritual, but were politicians. [...] But you also had periods of religious revival or reform—the greatest of them being the Protestant Reformation [...] That’s what you’re seeing here in Westeros.”¹²⁷ The Sparrows are effectively questioning the legitimacy of a Church leadership that is too concerned with the worldly and not enough with what they see as the Church’s primary objective: The Gods and the welfare of the poor believers. Martin explains on an example, “The two previous High Septons we’ve seen, the first was very corrupt in his own way [...] the one Tyrion appoints is less corrupt but is ineffectual and doesn’t make any waves. [...] So now [Cersei] has to deal with a militant and aggressive Protestant Reformation, if you will, that’s determined to resurrect a faith [...]”¹²⁸. In a sense, Westeros is experiencing a full-scale crisis of the Church on the brink of a religious war; medieval Europe has undergone many of those as well.

4.4 Form: The similarities of the language of worship

Both Christianity and the Faith of Seven worship the deity verbally, and therefore, the language of worship can be analysed. The focus will be put on the language of individual prayer and the language of shared worship in common situations, hymns and catechism.

¹²⁷ George R.R. Martin, Interview by James Hibberd. *Entertainment Weekly*, 24.5.2015, <<http://ew.com/article/2015/05/24/game-thrones-george-rr-martin-religion/?xid=IFT-Trending/>>, Accessed 16.7.2017.

¹²⁸ Hibberd, Interviewing Martin for *Entertainment Weekly* <<http://ew.com/article/2015/05/24/game-thrones-george-rr-martin-religion/?xid=IFT-Trending/>>.

4.4.1 The language of individual prayer

In both the real-life and the fictional religion, big emphasis lies on the individual relationship between the deity and the worshiper. This relationship is largely created through the medium of an individual prayer, either verbal, or within one's mind. Throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire*, several characters are seen praying alone to the seven aspects of the God, and especially the scenes of Catelyn Stark and Cersei Lannister praying give a more in-depth look at how an individual prayer is carried out. Generally, the believer addresses the appropriate face of the deity directly, by calling them by their assigned title. When praying alone, they usually speak with a free-flowing stream of consciousness; however, they always maintain a pleading tone (since they usually ask for something, such as kindness or safety for loved ones), and address the deity from the position of an inferior, with a polite imperative: "Guide me, wise lady. Show me the path I must walk, and do not let me stumble in the dark places that lie ahead,"¹²⁹ prays Catelyn Stark to the Crone. Similarly, Catholic – and other Christian – believers address God in their prayers directly, pleadingly, and from a position of an inferior, often using the term 'Father' to invoke him.

4.4.2 Blessings and Hymns

Both Christianity and the Faith of the Seven worship their deity in quite a ritualized manner. In the case of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the emphasis on rituals is even strengthened by the 'medieval-ish' society, which is largely illiterate and depends on rituals for understanding the Faith and the way of worship. Blessings and benedictions in the form of set phrases are used throughout the saga very often, indicating that it is a common practice among the inhabitants of Westeros. The benedictions often vary according to what the speaker wishes upon the addressee in a similar way that prayers are addressed to different facets of the God

¹²⁹ Martin, "Catelyn", *A Clash of Kings*, 310.

depending on what the worshiper prays for. Thus, when wishing strength for defence and safety, Davos Seaworth calls upon the Warrior (“May the Warrior defend you.”¹³⁰), but when a septon wishes for justice for a deceased person’s soul, he asks the Father (“May the Father judge him justly.”¹³¹). This is also a common phrase and it’s used many times in the series. Likewise, similar set phrases are used in English until today, even among unbelievers, such as “God bless you!”¹³² In both religions, those blessings use an optative subjunctive, a specific mood which is now almost extinct in English except for a few fixed expressions such as these. The optative subjunctive expresses a wish via either a ‘subject + verb in an imperative form’ way (e.g. God bless you!), or via ‘modal verb *may* + subject + predication’ way (e.g. May the Warrior defend you!)¹³³. Blessings and benedictions are also often repeated by the septon during services and ceremonies in the septs. In those cases, for the sake of the rituals, certain phrases are often repeated seven times, which is considered a holy and lucky number in the Faith of the Seven. For example, during a marriage ceremony, seven vows are made, the seven blessings invoked, and the seven promises exchanged.¹³⁴ While Christianity also considers many numbers important for different spiritual reasons, no number particularly stands out in a way that seven does in the Faith of Seven. Repetitions of specific phrases are sometimes used as an atonement for one’s sins, such as repetitions of the Lord’s Prayer or the Hail Mary.

As seen in Sansa Stark’s chapters in *A Clash of Kings*, it is common to sing hymns during the services in septs.¹³⁵ The lyrics to the hymns are clearly a basic part of education, as most of the people praying in the sept know them and join the singing. The hymn sung to the

¹³⁰ Martin, “Davos”, *A Storm of Swords*, 586.

¹³¹ Martin, “Jaime”, *A Storm of Swords*, 573.

¹³² Andreas H. Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen, eds. *Speech Acts in the History of English* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2008) 171.

¹³³ Randolph Quirk, et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London and New York: Longman, 1985) 11.39.

¹³⁴ Martin, “Tyrion”, *A Storm of Swords*, 552.

¹³⁵ Martin, “Sansa”, *A Clash of Kings*, 504.

Mother is included in its entirety: “Gentle Mother, font of mercy, / save our sons from war, we pray, / stay the swords and stay the arrows, / let them know a better day. / Gentle Mother, strength of women, / help our daughters through this fray, / soothe the wrath and tame the fury, / teach us all a kinder way.”¹³⁶ Much like with individual prayers, the deity is addressed directly and with respect; however, the hymnal form adds rhythm and rhyming, so that it is easier for the believers to remember and also easier to chant in unison, bringing a comforting sense of togetherness. The best Christian prayer to compare Mother’s hymn with would be the ‘Hail Mary’, which serves a similar purpose, as an appeal to a feminine deity associated with motherly gentleness and kindness: “Hail, Mary, full of grace, / the Lord is with thee. / Blessed art thou among women / and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. / Holy Mary, Mother of God, / pray for us sinners, / now and at the hour of our death. / Amen.”¹³⁷ While the Hail Mary is not intended to be sung, it is also a very rhythmical text, which helps the worshipper to remember it in its entirety. The rhythmical repetition also provides another sense of familiar ritualization, which might bring comfort to the worshippers. Moreover, both prayers, interestingly, address the deity in the first-person plural, speaking for the entire community of believers.

4.4.3 Catechism

In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, believers learn Catechism and consequently the right way of worship and the words of prayers and hymns through the *Book of Holy Prayer* and the *Seven-Pointed Star*¹³⁸. The first one is parallel to *The Book of Common Prayer*, as it contains the prayers and hymns, whereas the second one is an equivalent of the *Holy Bible*, because it also contains the doctrines and theology of the religion. It is similarly divided into sections, such

¹³⁶ Martin, “Sansa”, *A Clash of Kings*, 503.

¹³⁷ *Catechism*, “Common prayers”,

http://www.vatican.va/archive/compendium_ccc/documents/archive_2005_compendium-ccc_en.html.

¹³⁸ Martin, “Cersei”, *A Dance with Dragons*, 624.

as the Maiden's Book.¹³⁹ Furthermore, the children are taught about the seven aspects of the God through a notorious lullaby called "The Song of the Seven", which recites the traits of every aspect of the deity except for the Stranger¹⁴⁰. Again, the nursery rhyme nature of the song helps the children remember the attributes of the Gods, but it simply presents the deity as seven Gods and leaves out the idea of multi-unity. Moreover, the illiterate believers mainly learn about the Faith through artwork in the septs and the sermons of the septons; in parallel, art was a major source of biblical knowledge for medieval Christians, just like the sermons, which is the reason for a major demand for preaching in national languages in late Middle Ages.

¹³⁹ Martin, "Brienne", *A Feast for Crows*, 294.

¹⁴⁰ Martin, "Samwell", *A Storm of Swords*, 440.

Chapter 5: Stephen R. Donaldson

The *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever* are specific among the three chosen fantasy sagas in that they don't only take place within a secondary world, called 'the Land', but also partly in our, primary world. In terms of the location of the narrative, the primary world is merely a frame for the story happening within the Land; however, being an Earth of origin of the main character, it plays a huge role in the psychological background of Thomas Covenant and therefore, it influences his understanding and worldview. Religiously, the primary world operates according to the usual laws familiar to the audience; the Land does not contain any specific major organized religion, though.

5.1 Traces of religion: Lack of institutionalism

The society of the Land lacks any sort of organized religion beyond a vague, "partially acknowledged and oft-debated monotheism"¹⁴¹. The omission of the overt religious aspect is deliberate on Donaldson's part, as he himself admits: "I make virtually no use of "institutional religion" in my stories [...] "Religion" plays no role at all in the lives of the vast majority of my characters". When inquired about the reasons for this fact, Donaldson suggests, that he only created the aspects of the Land that were necessary for the story, and that religion is absent from his work because "otherwise [his] personal emotions [on the subject of religion] would distort and ultimately destroy the story"¹⁴². The nature and origins of such strong emotions were described in Chapter 2. The God at the centre of this monotheistic faith is the Creator, who – as the title suggests – is responsible for the formation of the world. He is believed to have created the Earth, now isolated by an arch of Time, a rainbow¹⁴³. His anti-thesis is the Despiser, also called Lord Foul or the Enemy, and many other names. Different

¹⁴¹ Senior 111.

¹⁴² Both: Donaldson, "8.3.2006", *Gradual interview*.

¹⁴³ Barkley 32.

creation myths in the story vary in regards to the hierarchy and mutual position of the Creator and the Enemy: the latter is a son, brother, or a creation of the former, or maybe implicitly even an aspect of the Creator's personality¹⁴⁴. Donaldson addresses the idea of shared identity in one of his interview, suggesting that he was drawing on a Christian tradition with this concept, specifically on "the Trinity, God in Three Persons. Except [he] obviously wasn't thinking of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. More like Creator, Destroyer, and Holy Ghost (wild magic). Or Creator, Destroyer, and [Covenant as] Acolyte."¹⁴⁵ The ambiguity of their hierarchy aside, the Creator and the Despiser form the original duality of the world, which is Donaldson's deliberate way of differentiating from the Christian theology, where God is also the Creator of Satan¹⁴⁶ Donaldson builds the Creator to be similar to Tolkien's and Christian's Creator: in the New Testament, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Thomas Covenant*, the Creator is mostly absent from the narrative and in a way unreachable for most of the story (in the New Testament, God is way less present than he is in the Old Testament – his presence is to some extent replaced with Jesus); the characters must depend on themselves in fulfilling their quests.

5.2 Content: The Creator and the Covenant

However; while the God of the New Testament and the creator of Middle-Earth chose to stay away from the events in their worlds deliberately, Donaldson's Creator is in a slightly different position.

5.2.1 The Creator: Omnipotence and Flaws

While the creation myths in the Land differ from each other in some details, they agree that the Creator is prevented to reach into and to interfere with the Land because of the

¹⁴⁴ Barkley 31-32.

¹⁴⁵ Donaldson, "27.4.2004", *Gradual interview*.

¹⁴⁶ Donaldson, "9.11.2007", *Gradual interview*.

rainbow arch.¹⁴⁷ Should he try, he would also enable the Enemy to get his hands on the Land and therefore allow him to cause more harm to his creations. Thus, the Creator is ultimately prevented from directly interfering with the events in his own world, and limited in what he can and can't do to fight the Despiser there.¹⁴⁸ The inhabitants of the land are aware of this: as aforementioned, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* don't directly address any specific religion, but rather, the series "lay stress on individual adherence to a chosen code of conduct"¹⁴⁹. This means that the population of the Land is conscious of the Creator's forced absence and the futility of any attempts to reach him through prayers or rituals. The lack of religion is directly linked to the Creator's inability to interfere.

Additionally, it shows that the Creator is not, in fact, omnipotent; even though he is technically capable of breaking the rainbow and reaching the Land, he cannot do it without exposing it to destruction. Similarly, he is unable to return Foamfollower from death, even though he does have power over life and death¹⁵⁰. It might be caused by a flaw in his original plan or a simple underestimation of the Enemy; however, he is capable of errors. In this quality, he differs from the Almighty Christian God, whose acts (or lack of thereof) are purely his own choices.

This corresponds, to a degree, with Donaldson's personal disillusionment with organized religion; "putting my views in your terms: we all have to work out our own salvation [...] It can't be given to us; so things like ritual and religion are usually (but certainly not always) useless". He adds that religion and rituals might actually be distractive, when one attempts to find redemption¹⁵¹. Such a difference serves as one of the examples of

¹⁴⁷ Barkley 114.

¹⁴⁸ Stephen R. Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, (London: Harper Voyager, 1993) III 1145.

¹⁴⁹ Senior, 154.

¹⁵⁰ Barkley 169.

¹⁵¹ Donaldson, "17.3.2010", *Gradual interview*.

how a fantasy author can be influenced by Christianity in another way; instead of following it as an inspiration, he uses it as a point to divert from.

5.2.2 The Free Will

Since the inhabitants of the Land have to save it – and themselves – on their own, and since the Creator is prevented from aiding or obstructing them, there is a strong emphasis on their own free will. Furthermore, free will plays a crucial role in the attempts to save the Land, because Thomas can only hope to stand against the Despiser, if he is free of any influences or compulsions.¹⁵² Even the Creator himself repeats the concept several times during his final encounter with Thomas at the end of *The Power that Preserves*; he reminds Thomas that while he chose him to save the Land without Covenant's consent, afterwards, Thomas was completely free of his influence or his power: "I elected you for the Land, but did not compel you to serve my purpose in the Land. You were free to damn Land and Earth and Time and all, if you chose"¹⁵³, he says. Donaldson expresses why it is so important for Covenant to choose freely whether or not to save the Land; "only a person who has truly experienced the consequences of his/her own destructive actions is qualified to evaluate--is, indeed, capable of evaluating--his/her future actions in order to make meaningful choices between destruction and preservation"¹⁵⁴. This adds to the previously mentioned idea of the value of self-salvation.

In Catholic theology, the importance of free will is also emphasized, as "God willed that man should be 'left in the hand of his own counsel,' so that he might of his own accord seek his Creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him."¹⁵⁵ The importance is put on the fact that the believers have to choose to turn to God willingly and on

¹⁵² Barkley 142.

¹⁵³ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, III 1145.

¹⁵⁴ Donaldson, "13.7.2004", *Gradual interview*.

¹⁵⁵ *Catechism*, 1730. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P5N.HTM

their own, otherwise their trust in God would have lesser value. However, Donaldson parents, as mentioned in Chapter 2, were Presbyterians, and as such followed Calvin's notion of predestination. Donaldson mentions being brought up in such a belief and finding it "offensive as soon as [he was] old enough to understand it". He elaborates, that to him, the idea of predestination makes a joke of free will, and admits that his strong urge to emphasize free will "may well be a reaction *against* the particular beliefs of [his] parents"¹⁵⁶. Again, Donaldson shows how Christianity can be used also as an inspiration to bounce from and define his ideas against.

5.2.3 The proxy: Covenant and Jesus

Thus, Covenant chooses the fate of the Land freely, because the Creator must not – and cannot – compel him, once he arrives in the Land. The position of Christian God is different, as was explained; in the New Testament, he could come among his faithful himself, but chooses not to. Instead, much like the Creator, he sends someone else, his son – and an extension of himself – Jesus. In this way, both Covenant and Jesus act as 'a proxy' of sorts for God on Earth. They have both been picked without volunteering; "This commandment have I received of my Father"¹⁵⁷, explains Jesus to his disciples and much like him, Thomas was elected by the Creator to save the Land without his own consent, as mentioned in 5.2.2. However, just like Covenant was left to his own free will afterwards, Jesus is also free to not obey this command and choose not to die. Similarly to how Donaldson emphasizes Covenant's free choice between preservation and destruction, it is Jesus' willingness to give his life for the Christians that turns his death into salvation for all believers. The motivation and the outcome might be different (Thomas does not deliver all the inhabitants of the Land from sin), but the aspect of free choice is strongly present in both, as Jesus claims: "No man

¹⁵⁶ Donaldson, "13.2.2008", *Gradual interview*.

¹⁵⁷ John 10:18.

taketh [my life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again”¹⁵⁸.

The aura of saviourism is another thing they share to a degree: Jesus is believed to be the foretold Messiah of the Jews¹⁵⁹, who will return again when needed, while many people of the Land also think Covenant to be a reincarnation of Berek Halfhand, one of their greatest legendary heroes¹⁶⁰, whose return in times of need has also been prophesised.¹⁶¹ Accordingly, just as Jesus was worshiped more after his death – though he did have a following before it as well – after his demise from the Land, Thomas is allowed by the Creator to witness, unseen, a celebration of himself led by Lord Mhoram; Covenant is hailed and praised as a saviour, including a song devoted to him, in which he is celebrated by many names and titles. And while ‘Covenant’ is his literal last name, Jesus is the metaphorical covenant: the Bible calls his sacrifice the “everlasting covenant” between God and man.¹⁶²

5.3 Form: The Language of the Creator and Covenant

Because the Creator isn’t present in the Land and its inhabitants are aware of the fact that he is unable to help them or hear their prayers; as a consequence, they don’t really pray at all. This fruitfulness of worship is also behind the lack of any prevailing organized religion. The inhabitants of the Land don’t come into any contact with their Creator, but unlike them the main character, Thomas Covenant, does.

5.3.1 Dialogues with the Creator

In the First Chronicles, the Creator himself only appears in two short scenes, on both occasions in the form of a beggar; first, at the beginning, before Thomas is sent off to the

¹⁵⁸ John 10:17.

¹⁵⁹ John 1:41.

¹⁶⁰ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, I 77.

¹⁶¹ Barkley 55.

¹⁶² Hebrews 13:20-21.

Land, and second, at the very end, when he returns to his own world. Both times, this encounter is a short dialogue between the two. Upon examination of the language of those dialogues, a few things can be pointed out straight away. During the first meeting of the Creator, Covenant is unaware of his identity, but the manner in which he speaks with him doesn't really differ from the second one, where he knows who the beggar really is. If anything, Thomas seems to be more bitter as he realizes how the Creator changed his fate. But the way he addresses the Creator is rather casual; Covenant shrugs and disagrees with him, and even angrily interrupts him: "I didn't earn anything.' Faint anger stirred in him"¹⁶³ This is definitely a stark difference from how characters in the Bible address God when talking directly to him. For example, when Moses speaks with God in the form of a bush on fire, but also in all the other examples, his replies express respect, fear even. Moses also questions God, but he does with utmost respect, and his words show that unlike Covenant, he is aware of his own inferior position¹⁶⁴. Thomas' familiar tone in addressing the Creator comes from his 'unbelieving': "There's nothing you can do for me. I told Foul I don't believe in him. I don't believe in you either."¹⁶⁵ As an Unbeliever, he doesn't feel to be inferior to the deity or owe it religious respect.

And the Creator accepts this mode of conversation; in fact, it's him, who expresses respect to Covenant. Instead of speaking from the position of power – which he has, since their encounter takes place in the primary world, where the Creator isn't limited - he also reminds Covenant that he has power over his life – the Creator pleads, asks for Thomas' attention ("Covenant heard sympathy, respect, even gratitude in the voice"¹⁶⁶). He reasons where biblical God commands, explains instead of informing. Even the linguistic means of

¹⁶³ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, III 1146.

¹⁶⁴ Exodus 3:4-4:17

¹⁶⁵ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, III 1146.

¹⁶⁶ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, III 1145.

their speech pattern differ: God of Exodus says “I will” when he talks about the future, “I am”¹⁶⁷ when he speaks of himself; on the contrary, the Creator uses “I wish”, “I could”, “I would”¹⁶⁸. With this approach, Donaldson deliberately avoids putting his Creator on a throne and brings yet another proof of his lack of omnipotence. Intentionally, he builds the Creator to be the opposite of the Christian God and once again uses Christianity as an inspiration to draw away from.

5.3.2 Covenant’s profanity

In a narrative with little to no allusions to scripture or the language of worship, one occasion stands out, and that is Covenant’s swearing and profanities. “Damnation,”¹⁶⁹ or “Hellfire. Hellfire and bloody damnation. What’s happening to me?”¹⁷⁰, he says instead of more common swears. Those terms connect negatively to Christian theology, where hellfire and damnation are the things that await sinners after death, instead of Kingdom of Heaven. Covenant was born and brought up in our primary world, with all the religions familiar to the audience, Christianity included. Therefore, the ideas of hellfire and eternal damnation aren’t that unfamiliar to him, even though his specific religious background is not specified. However, the form of those profanities is unusual and sticks out in the text. Donaldson claims, that their origin lies in his missionary upbringing, and that it’s “probably the sort of swearing that only a missionary’s kid can truly relate to”¹⁷¹. Furthermore, this exotic way of swearing even more emphasises his difference from the other characters and his lack of belonging in the Land and the specific position there.

¹⁶⁷ Exodus 3:12,14.

¹⁶⁸ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, III 1146.

¹⁶⁹ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, I 64.

¹⁷⁰ Donaldson, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, I 55.

¹⁷¹ Donaldson, “22.10.2004”, *Gradual interview*.

Chapter 6: Other Post-Tolkien Authors

After Tolkien's unprecedented success in the 1950s, many writers tried to follow him with their own works, each one contributing to the success of the genre in their own way. Many of those writers created their own unique secondary world, or decided to set their narratives in worlds parallel to ours, but all of them dealt in their stories with social and philosophical questions, matters of ethics, and also religion. Even though the Anglo-Saxon world is becoming more secular in the recent decades, many of the fantasy authors of the second half of the 20th century still grew up influenced by Christianity, be it positively or negatively; subsequently, Christianity has an (conscious and unconscious) impact on how they decide to solve the religious matters in their narratives. Sylvia Kelso adds that those authors, who did not include Gods overtly or implicitly, "have most frequently handled the dilemma by treatments of religion that range from dismissive or cosmetic to overtly hostile"¹⁷². She also comments, that the combination of magic, religion and spirituality is often presented already merged in unity¹⁷³. Recently, contemporary fantasy branched into more supernatural and paranormal sub-genres, which revive the phenomenon of beings such as vampires or werewolves, popularised for example by Laurell Hamilton.

6.1 Madeleine L'Engle, Phillip Pullman and Joanne Kathleen Rowling

Shortly after the publishing of *The Lord of the Rings*, a wave of new fantasy stories was written and printed. Among those were also the novels *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* by Alan Garner, Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time* or Terry Brooks' *The Sword of Shannara*, which came out in 1960, 1962 and 1977 respectively.

¹⁷² Sylvia Kelso, "The God in the Pentagram: Religion and Spirituality in Modern Fantasy", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 18.1 (2007): 72. JSTOR, <www.jstor.org/stable/24351027>. Accessed 13.7.2017.

¹⁷³ Kelso, 72.

In the later decades, many other fantasy authors emerged and gained fame, such as Terry Pratchett, or Phillip Pullman, who did not attempt to cloak his religious allusions in any ways, and his books stirred major controversies especially among the Christian readers. In his direct approach and mainly negative attitude towards religion, he represents the overtly hostile branch of writers.

His trilogy *His Dark Materials* was published during the second half of 1990s, just like the first books of Rowling's *Harry Potter* saga. Rowling follows in the footsteps of Tolkien in that she excludes any overt traces of religion from her world, but her values influenced by Christianity are interwoven into the narrative. Rowling is, of course, much more universal in introducing these themes, so that her contemporary readers of different faiths wouldn't feel excluded, but they are present in the narrative nonetheless.

6.1.1 A Wrinkle in Time

L'Engle didn't receive any formal religious education, but eventually found her way into Christianity through a woman who was her caretaker.¹⁷⁴ Over the years, her faith gained importance in her life and she became more active in the religious community, despite being uncertain about her personal believe in God. Those views reflected in her work as well; L'Engle says that in *A Wrinkle in Time*, she wrote about “the universe in which I could love and be loved by a creating God, [...] I wrote it for [God].”¹⁷⁵ With time-travelling elements, *A Wrinkle in time* is a fantasy story reaching into the genre of science-fiction. L'Engle herself bases her worldview equally on science and Christianity, and she believes them to be one and the same, co-existing and feeding off of each other¹⁷⁶. One of the Christian motives she

¹⁷⁴ Madeleine L'Engle, Interview for *Christian Today*, www.christiantoday.com, 7.9.2007, <<http://www.christiantoday.com/ct/2007/septemberweb-only/136-52.0.html?start=2>>, Accessed 1.8.2017.

¹⁷⁵ L'Engle, Interview for *Christian Today* <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/septemberweb-only/136-52.0.html?start=4>>.

¹⁷⁶ Madeleine L'Engle, Interview by Bob Abernathy for *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, www.pbs.org, 10.2.2012, <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2012/02/10/november-17-2000-madeleine-lengle/3639/>>, Accessed 1.8.2017.

includes is the return home, the journey back, which is also present in Tolkien's work. To this, L'Engle says: "The journey homewards. Coming home. That's what it's all about. [...]" That's probably the chief difference between the Christian and the secular artist – the purpose of the work [...] is to further the coming of the kingdom, [...] and to turn our feet home"¹⁷⁷, which she achieves in *A Wrinkle in Time* in both allegorical and literal meaning, when the Murry family is reunited. Furthermore, as Rolland Hein suggests, the three Mrs Ws, Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who and Mrs Which, even though their physical forms allude more to the Greek mythology, are supposedly messengers of God sent to help people do good¹⁷⁸. The Evil to defeat in the narrative is disembodied, and doesn't even have a name other than IT; what it desires is to feed on the will of humans, which is why it also imprisoned Meg's father – this alludes to L'Engle's passion for science and free critical thinking. The only way to oppose it is for Meg to combine her "will and the enabling perceptions of Christian faith"¹⁷⁹ L'Engle didn't include God within her story overtly, the characters don't announce their belonging to any faith, but the presence of Christian truth is invested in the story from the beginning, as Hein reminds by quoting: "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God"¹⁸⁰.

6.1.2 His Dark Materials

Much like Stephen Donaldson, Pullman grew up under the influence of a family member closely affiliated with Christianity, as his grandfather was a clergyman of the Church of England; therefore, Pullman was brought up never doubting the existence of God¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁷ Hein 261.

¹⁷⁸ Hein 266.

¹⁷⁹ Hein 271.

¹⁸⁰ Hein 272.

¹⁸¹ Phillip Pullman, Interview for *Surefish*, www.surefish.co.uk, November 2002,

<http://www.surefish.co.uk/culture/features/pullman_interview.htm>, Accessed 2.8.2017.

However, his attitude towards God and towards organized religion especially significantly changed over the years, and the shift can be very clearly observed in his most famous work, *His Dark Materials* trilogy. The title itself comes from the line in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which is concerned with deeply religious themes such as the fall of Lucifer and of man, the original sin. Those themes are very prominent in *His Dark Materials* and to a degree, the books reflect Pullman's own views, which brought the attention of Christian believers to them and caused noticeable controversy. The main character Lyra is supposed to be the prophesised new Eve of the world with "the power to make a fateful choice, on which the future of all the worlds depended"¹⁸² Similarly, her friend Will is the new Adam, and their story is Pullman's re-telling of the story of the original sin, a second fall. However, Pullman subverts the meaning of what the Fall of Man brings; according to the Bible, eating the fruit of knowledge brought the misery of mankind and banishment from Eden ("cursed is the ground for thy sake"¹⁸³ says God), whereas in *His Dark Materials*, Pullman establishes the Fall more as an ascension, as it brings wisdom and self-awareness to man, which he deems positive. When Lord Asriel talks to Lyra at the end of *The Golden Compass*, he calls the story of origins of shame and sin a manipulation of the Church, which it had "taught for thousands of years"¹⁸⁴

The Church as an organized religion is represented in the books by the Magisterium, who firmly rules the world of *His Dark Materials* in a dogmatic, fundamentalist dictatorship, and as Lyra later finds out, doesn't shy away from brutal torturous practices. The main outrage of the Christian organizations lies in the fact that Pullman sets the Magisterium as clear villains of the story, and that it so clearly resembles some of the institutions of the Church¹⁸⁵. In fact, according to Pullman, the God of his secondary world is a fraud and his

¹⁸² Phillip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, Kindle edition, (RHCP Digital, 2015) 66.

¹⁸³ Genesis 4:17.

¹⁸⁴ Phillip Pullman, *The Northern Lights*, Kindle edition, (RHCP Digital, 2015) 373.

¹⁸⁵ Elizabeth Rose Gruner, "Wrestling with Religion: Pullman, Pratchett and the Uses of the Story", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 36.3 (2011): 276, <doi:10.1353/chq.2011.0035>.

heroine sides with those who are against him; he admits that his story is about killing God¹⁸⁶. In this antagonism towards religion, the books reflect Pullman's own disillusionment with religion of any kind, about which he says: "when you look at organised religion [...] you see cruelty and tyranny and repression. It's almost a universal law."¹⁸⁷

6.1.3 Harry Potter

On the contrary, Rowling was brought up in a family of non-believers, but admits to having a great religious curiosity, even as a child.¹⁸⁸ The *Harry Potter* saga is set in the contemporary Great Britain, which is diverse in many aspects, such as race and religion. Thus, even though she is a devoted member of the Church of England, Rowling tries to stay away from organized religion in the books, so that she wouldn't be accused of promoting one faith over the others. Additionally, she believed that opening up too much about her religion would spoil the ending of her story¹⁸⁹. This suggests, that Rowling is aware of the values and themes of Christianity that she put inside the narrative. The power of self-sacrifice that was mentioned in 3.2 is present and largely emphasized at both the beginning and the end of the series, and there is even some magical power attributed to it. When Lily Potter dies for her infant son, Voldemort becomes literally unable to kill him; thus, her willing sacrifice becomes the main defensive shield for Harry, in a way similar to how Jesus' sacrifice for the believers shields them from sin. Moreover, at the end of *Deathly Hollows*, it takes Harry's willing death to defeat Voldemort once and for all. The series never mention God and never allude to scripture, except for the epitaph on the grave of Harry's parents, "The last enemy that shall be

¹⁸⁶ Phillip Pullman, Interview with Steve Meacham for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, www.smh.com.au, 13.12.2003, <<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/12/12/1071125644900.html>>, Accessed 2.8.2017.

¹⁸⁷ Phillip Pullman, Interview for *Surefish* http://www.surefish.co.uk/culture/features/pullman_interview.htm.

¹⁸⁸ Joanne K. Rowling, Interview by Nancy Gibbs for *Time Magazine*, [time.com](http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1695388_1695436,00.html), 19.12.2007, <http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1695388_1695436,00.html>, Accessed 3.8.2017.

¹⁸⁹ Rowling, Interview for *Time Magazine*, <http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1695388_1695436,00.html>.

destroyed is death.”, which comes from Paul’s list to Corinthians. The quote reflects on Jesus’ resurrection, through which he conquered Death and effectively became its master; similarly, when Harry comes back to life and unites all three Deathly Hollows, he becomes the Master of Death from the legend. Another very strongly Christian motive in the *Deathly Hollows* book would be penance, the importance of which was also discussed in 3.2 in relation to Tolkien. During Harry’s final fight with Voldemort, the boy wizard offers his enemy mercy should he repent; Rowling herself claimed, that “if he had repented, he could have been healed more deeply than anyone would have supposed”¹⁹⁰. This idea is, again, also used in *The Lord of the Rings* with its main evil character Sauron.

Despite containing so many Christian themes, the *Harry Potter* saga has often been called anti-Christian and promoting occultism, Wicca and witchcraft, because it takes place in a school of wizardry and the characters use magic; several churches in the USA have even organized book burnings of the series. But in spite of some of the religious criticism, the *Harry Potter* books have been one of the best sold novels of the English language and are said to have inspired an entire generation of children to reading.

¹⁹⁰ Rowling, Interview for *Time Magazine*,
<http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1695388_1695436,00.html>.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The close textual analysis in this thesis proves, that Christianity manifests in the post-WWII fantasy works of in several different ways. Christianity, along with Roman law and Greek philosophy, forms one of the pillars of Anglo-Saxon society, and since art should reflect the society, Christianity influences the literature with various degrees of strength, fantasy being no exception. The analysis shows different approaches to religious themes within the story, and that some fantasy authors create secondary worlds with overt presence of deities and fully fleshed fictional religions, while others decide to exclude Gods from their narratives and consider the religious themes internally, weaving the Christian motives into the story itself. Moreover, a connection can be drawn between the personal attitude of the authors towards Christianity and the way they utilize Christian theology or language (although their personal faith is only one of the decisive factors). Generally, it is more common for authors who count themselves as Christians and have a positive relationship with the religion to not include God in their narratives directly and to use the biblical theology in their stories implicitly, whereas the authors who call themselves former Christians, agnostics and atheists, or have negative attitude towards religion, tend to depict their specific fictional religions or deities as more flawed and often portray the organized Church as corrupt, useless or oppressive. However, there are of course exceptions to the generalization.

This thesis focused on examining several fantasy authors and their most famous works and the specific manifestations of Christianity in them from two aspects: the content of the narrative and the form of it. The first of those considered was J.R.R. Tolkien as the populariser of the genre and devout Catholic, who created a template for writing a fantasy narrative with Christian values and themes in mind. Tolkien is an example of a religious author, who excludes deity from his narrative but includes the morals, values and motives of his Faith into the story. In terms of content, Christianity had major influence on the way Tolkien built the

concepts of Good and Evil in his story. In *The Lord of the Rings*, no characters are created inherently evil, but only become such if they succumb to the corruptive force of power lust, as was shown on the examples of Boromir and Saruman. Contrary to this, the ability to resist the temptation of power and wisdom related to it are counted among the main virtues of Good, together with self-sacrifice, as can be seen in Frodo's character arch. Furthermore, even the evil characters are able to move from Evil to Good through atonement; thus, no character is condemned thoroughly and always have a chance for penance. In terms of form, the absence of prayer confirms the lack of direct worship in the books. However, Elbereth, as one of the Valar (who do not make a direct appearance in the trilogy) is often invoked and her name seems to have some sort of power to console and encourage the characters. Often, she is also a subject of the elvish hymns and songs composed to praise her and similarities can be found between those hymns and prayers for Virgin Mary.

On the other hand, G.R.R.Martin, another author considered in this thesis, represents the second group of fantasy authors, who were exposed and therefore familiarized with Christianity, but didn't remain Christian in their adulthood. The secondary world of his series *A Song of Ice and Fire* includes many religions, of which the Faith of Seven is based on and resembles Christianity. In terms of content, the aspect of seven faces of one God is based on the concept of Holy Trinity. Additionally, the entire hierarchy, responsibilities of septons and the relationship of the church and secular power are based on the history of medieval Christian church, as are the motives of corrupted religious leaders and the Sparrows as a form of religious revival. In terms of form, the language of both individual prayer and communal worship resembles that of Christian prayers and the specific form of common blessings and hymns to the Gods' praise, which appear very often in the text, can also be traced back to the form of Christian prayers such as Hail Mary. Finally, the holy books and religious guides are in form quite similar to Holy Bible and Book of Common Prayer.

Last of the largely considered author was Stephen R. Donaldson, who represents a sort of middle ground approach between the two. Donaldson's personal disillusionment with Christianity and organized religions in general stemmed from his deeply religious, missionary influenced childhood. In his trilogy, *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, the Unbeliever*, he creates a specific religious situation; the Creator of his Land exists, but he is rendered helpless, because he can't reach into the Land and save it from harm. Therefore, no real major religion exists within the Land, as it is useless to invoke someone unable to help. Thus, Donaldson's disagreement with predestination shows in the Creator's flaws and lack of omnipotence, and also in the huge emphasis on free will all throughout the series, but especially in the person of Thomas Covenant, who must freely make a choice between saving and damning the Land. In this and many other aspects, Covenant bears similarities to another metaphorical covenant from the New Testament, Jesus Christ. In terms of form, Donaldson again uses Christianity as an inspiration to divert from; in his encounters with the Creator, he subverts the traditional roles of God and the mortals, as it is the Creator who speaks with respect and even pleads – something that never happens to Christian God.

Apart from these three authors, some other fantasy writers were briefly examined. The analysis shows, that as the genre develops, the authors often combine the religious and spiritual aspects with magic, which can sometimes cause controversy among traditional Christians. Despite that, the development in the genre rapidly continues and deepens in the two basic streams suggested above. Among the first – Christians writing fantasy without overt presence of God, but with Christian motives and values pervading the narrative – Madeleine L'Engle or J.K.Rowling can be counted; Rowling proves that a fantasy story can successfully incorporate Christian themes such as the importance of self-sacrifice even in the contemporary times. The other branch of writers is represented for example by Phillip Pullman, another author who takes the criticism of the dogmatic and oppressive nature of

organized religion through the medium of a fantasy novel to another, deeper level.

Nevertheless, the ways of dealing with Christianity, and religion in general, of various fantasy authors have branched significantly in the past decades, which helped find larger audience and subsequently popularized the genre even more to the state where it is now, with Game of Thrones being one of the most popular TV shows on air or J.K.Rowling as the first billion-dollar author.

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