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Abstract

There are many speculations on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy as a religious allegory or of Gandalf, a wizard and one of the main characters, as the representation of Christ in the novel, however, this thesis will discuss explicitly the parallel between Frodo Baggins, the main character in the trilogy and Christ's journey in *The Bible* as the more accurate Christ Figure in the novel. Reading Gandalf as the Christ Figure, or any other character, fails to recognize the implications of Frodo's journey. Comparing the two characters shows how Frodo is the modern parallel to Christ in literature because of the incredible weight that his journey holds, the faith that others put in him, and the devastation that would directly result if he were to fail in his quest.

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Frodo Baggins: The Modern Parallel to Christ in Literature

There are many speculations on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy as a religious allegory or of Gandalf, a wizard and one of the main characters, as the representation of Christ in the novel, however, this thesis will discuss explicitly the parallel between Frodo Baggins, the main character in the trilogy and Christ's journey in *The Bible* as the more accurate Christ Figure in the novel. Reading Gandalf as the Christ Figure, or any other character, fails to recognize the implications of Frodo's journey. Comparing the two characters shows how Frodo is the modern parallel to Christ in literature because of the incredible weight that his journey holds, the faith that others put in him, and the devastation that would directly result if he were to fail in his quest.

Traditionally a Christ Figure is described as a literary character who resembles Christ in key ways, usually someone who ultimately sacrifices himself for the overall good of others or the world. One of the most popular Christ Figures in all of literature is Aslan in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. In C.S. Lewis's novel, Aslan appears in a fictional, alternate world called Narnia after an evil White Witch has taken over Narnia and turned animals who do not worship her to stone. Before Aslan arrives, four children find themselves in Narnia, one of them, Edmond, is seduced by the Witch and betrays his family to serve her. The White Witch plans to kill the child, but Aslan offers himself in place for Edmond, forgiving the boy for betraying his family and Aslan; however, Aslan does not die. He returns from death, resurrected just like Christ, and saves all the creatures of Narnia from evil. Before he returns, however, there are many who doubted him, but they all are transformed and forgiven and ultimately commit their to him and allow him to rule. More often than not in literature, Christ Figures, like Aslan,

give a message that follows the Christian belief: the belief that Christ died for the sins of all and, therefore, all humanity is forgiven for their sins.

Christ's sacrifice of his life for the sins of the world is recognized as the ultimate sacrifice and therefore provides a meaningful allegory. In his book *How To Read Literature Like A Professor* Thomas C. Foster writes, "perhaps the parallel [between Christ and the Christ Figure] deepens our sense of the character's sacrifice if we see it as somehow similar to the greatest sacrifice we know of. Maybe it has to do with redemption, or hope, or miracle" (123). But it is not just a sacrifice that qualifies a character as a Christ Figure; it is the sacrifice of one's life, or the metaphorical equivalent, for something grand and extraordinary. A Christ Figure sacrifices himself for the greater good and benefit of others and of the world. He or she is often a wise, teacher-like character who will take on the task, whatever it may be, without being asked. This individual, who so willingly volunteers his or her life, is also often doubted by those around him and it is this doubt that others experience that builds their faith in the Christ Figure. Essentially, a Christ Figure is one who willingly volunteers to complete a task that holds the state of the world at risk, and who asks nothing in return from anyone else but faith.

In J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy a hobbit named Frodo Baggins is entrusted with a ring, the "One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them" (Tolkien 49). The Ring was created by the Dark Lord Sauron and with it, he has the power to rule all of Middle Earth, corrupting creatures to do his bidding and destroying all who stand in the way. Long ago, nineteen rings were created; three rings for the Elves, seven for the Dwarves, and nine for Men. One additional ring was then forged by Sauron himself – the One Ring to rule all the others. Sauron put so much of his power into the Ring that his existence depended on it. However things did not go as Sauron planned; the

Elves did not use their rings and so he had no power over them and the Dwarves rings did not respond to his as he had expected. Only the nine rings made for man responded to his, making the men his slaves and giving him complete control over them. When a war breaks out, Sauron loses his Ring, and therefore his power. The Ring is then rediscovered years later by a creature not much different from a hobbit named Sméagol who falls under the spell of the Ring, a spell which turns him into a hideous, pitiful creature referred to as Gollum.

In Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, Bilbo Baggins, Frodo's uncle, mistakenly discovers the Ring and pockets it for himself. Gandalf, the wizard who leads Frodo on the journey to Mount Doom, discovers in a later book, *The Lord of the Rings*, that Bilbo has the Ring and demands he give it up. The Ring is then taken to a council and it is delegated that Frodo will take it to Mount Doom to destroy so that Sauron will never be able to wield it and have rule of Middle Earth again, but Sauron is looking for it and the Ring calls to him so the journey is dangerous for Frodo and whoever might help him. Sauron still has power over the men who possess the nine rings and they have become his servants. They are called the Nazgûl, Ringwraiths, or the Black Riders. Whenever Frodo puts the Ring on, Sauron can see him and Frodo is often inflicted with great pain, but Sauron is not the only one who can sense when Frodo has the Ring on. The Ring calls to the Black Riders as well and they attack Frodo and his the company throughout their journey. Frodo is given the burden of having to carry the Ring the entire voyage, but he is not alone. At the Council of Elrond, the Elfking Elrond, after Frodo volunteers to carry the Ring, creates a company of nine to journey with Frodo. The Company sets out and is faced with many obstacles along the way created by the Dark Lord Sauron. As they get closer and closer to Mount Doom, where Sauron is, the Ring gets heavier and heavier for Frodo until it is too heavy to bear by

himself and Sam Gamgee, Frodo's faithful servant and friend, must carry Frodo and the Ring up the mountain.

Despite Frodo's pivotal role, as I will show, the critics tend not to agree that Frodo is, in fact, a Christ Figure. In *The Presence of Christ in The Lord of the Rings* Peter J. Kreeft claims that "there is no one complete, concrete, visible Christ Figure in *The Lord of the Rings*, like Aslan in Narnia. But Christ is really, though invisibly, present in the whole *The Lord of the Rings*" (222). Kreeft deliberates about Gandalf, Frodo and Aragorn being the three clear Christ Figures in the trilogy, but his sweeping claim that multiple characters in the book are Christ-like figures, dilutes his claim. If they are all Christ figures, no one is a Christ figure; in the biblical literature, there is only ever one. In another text, *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, Joseph Pearce asserts that Frodo is not the Christ Figure in the trilogy at all times in the novel, stating that there are many others, which again refutes the notion of a single figurehead. Pearce claims that although he acknowledges Frodo as a Christ Figure, he is "only a Christ Figure insofar as he is the Ring-bearer and insofar as the Ring can be seen to symbolize sin" (Pearce 98), but this too is inaccurate because of several factors, chief among them Frodo's willingness to sacrifice himself for the greater good of all of Middle Earth, which directly parallels the sacrifice of Christ. Lastly in, *The Postmodern Sacred: Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres*, Emily McAvan discusses Gandalf, Aragorn and Frodo as equal potential Christ Figures in Tolkien's work. McAvan discusses Gandalf's resurrection and his change from a grey wizard to a white wizard in death and how this parallels Christ's resurrection. She also examines Aragon and determines that he is the most obvious Christ Figure because he is "the long-lost King of Gondor" (111). She points out that "the third book of the series is called *The Return of the King*, and it is this aspect that marks

Aragorn as a Christ Figure – specifically Christ as he appears at the end of time” (McAven 111). She lastly discusses Frodo, but simply to compare the similarities of Christ and Frodo being pierced throughout their journeys; she then discredits Frodo completely for falling victim to the Ring’s powers at Mount Doom. The problem is that McAven’s claims only consider a small part of each character instead of looking at their overall journey throughout the novel; she makes a few obvious connections, but fails to dive deeper into the novel and its characters to make more thoughtful parallels. My analysis will show that it is only Frodo who qualifies as a modern Christ Figure in the J.R.R. Tolkien series, and that this is essential to understanding the character of Frodo in the novel, but also his relationship to readers.

Although Tolkien stated in his last interview that he did not intend for *The Lord of the Rings* to be a Christian allegory and asserted, “No. I dislike allegory whenever I smell it,” – when further pressed about Frodo’s struggle and journey, he said, “but that seems I suppose more like an allegory of the human race. I’ve always been impressed that we’re here surviving because of the indomitable courage of quite small people against impossible odds: jungles, volcanoes, wild beasts... they struggle on, almost blindly in a way” (Cloud). So while Tolkien avoided or denied all assertions that his work might be a religious allegory, critics are convinced that Tolkien’s work is a Christian metaphor with religious meaning hidden throughout and certainly the evidence bears this out.

Kreeft discusses in his book *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind The Lord of the Rings*, the many different ways that Christianity is folded into Tolkien’s trilogy. His main statement is that Christ “is more clearly present in Gandalf, Frodo, and Aragorn, the three Christ Figures. First of all, all three undergo different forms of death and resurrection. Second, all three are saviors: through their self-sacrifice they help save all of Middle-earth from the demonic sway

of Sauron” (222-3). While this claim is true in an obvious sense, seeing as aspects of Christ and his journey are present in each of these character’s journeys throughout the novel, Kreeft also states that “there is no one complete, concrete, visible Christ figure in *The Lord of the Rings*, like Aslan in Narnia” (222) . In Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as Kreeft points out, both Gandalf and Aragorn “undergo different forms of death and resurrection” (222). Gandalf’s death in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the first of the trilogy, is similar to the death of Christ in that both are faced with evil and sacrifice themselves and then both are resurrected. Christ confronted the sin of mankind and Gandalf confronted the evil and terrifying Balrog; both died, for very different reasons, but were then resurrected. There is, however, no more depth to the parallel as both Gandalf and Christ sacrificed themselves for very different reasons. In Tolkien’s book, Gandalf begins to lead the newly formed Fellowship of the Ring, consisting of Frodo and three other Hobbits, two Men, an Elf, a Dwarf, and Gandalf, to Mount Doom in order to destroy the Ring. Gandalf is forced to lead the Fellowship under the mountains, through Moria, when the other route failed to work. Deep in the mines of Moria, the Fellowship is faced with Orcs, more servants of the Dark Lord Sauron, and are battling their way out when the Orcs flee due to the arrival of the Balrog, a menacing creature covered in fire and darkness, “a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it... The flames roared up to greet it, and wreathed about it; and a black smoke swirled in the air. Its streaming mane kindled, and blazed behind it. In its right hand was a blade like a stabbing tongue of fire, in its left it held a whip of many thongs” (Tolkien 321). Gandalf turns to face the Balrog so that the others can escape and this is where the parallel begins to waver. Gandalf sacrifices himself so that the others can continue on the journey, but the completion and success of their mission does not rely on Gandalf’s sacrifice:

The Balrog reached the bridge... It raised the whip, and the thongs whined and cracked. Fire came from its nostrils. But Gandalf stood firm. 'You cannot pass,' he said... At that moment Gandalf lifted his staff, and crying aloud he smote the bridge before him. The staff broke asunder and fell from his hand... The bridge cracked. Right at the Balrog's feet it broke, and the stone upon which it stood crashed into the gulf, while the rest remained, posed, quivering like a ton of rock thrust out into emptiness. With a terrible cry the Balrog fell forward, and its shadow plunged down and vanished. But even as it fell it swung its whip, and the thongs lashed and curled about the wizard's knees, dragging him to the brink. He staggered and fell, grasped vainly at the stone, and slid into the abyss. 'Fly, you fools!' he cried, and was gone. (Tolkien 322)

In this act, Gandalf allows the others to carry on, but Middle Earth is not saved because of it; it is simply an act of self-sacrifice in a moment of need. Gandalf later resurrects and comes back as Gandalf the White, more powerful than he was before death as Gandalf the Gray, to complete his task of guiding the Fellowship to Mordor, but his return lends power only to him. Though Gandalf's sacrifice of his life enabled Frodo to continue on the journey, it did not end the journey or result in the freedom of Middle Earth, therefore, it is only just one part of the greater journey and not enough to warrant him a Christ Figure. If sacrifice was the only thing a character had to do, endless amounts of characters would be deemed Christ Figures, which would reduce the meaning of the figure and eliminate the benefit of them.

Kreeft makes the same claim when he argues that Aragorn is a Christ Figure, essentially just because of his self-sacrifice; however, Kreeft does not specify what sacrifice Aragorn makes and, while the self-sacrifice of Frodo and Gandalf are obvious, there is not one thing that sticks out in the novel that is his decided sacrifice. Aragorn's love for Arwen, the daughter of the Elf-

king Elrond is a romance that must be put on hold until Sauron is defeated and Aragorn claims his title as King of Gondor. Aragorn delays his love for Arwen to protect Frodo and aid in destroying the Ring, but it's hardly a sacrifice for the good of all man. Aragorn's sacrifice of love pales in comparison to the sacrifice that Frodo takes upon himself in the novel. Another viable possibility is when Aragorn leads his army to the Black Gate of Mordor to try to give Frodo more time to destroy the Ring. This act could be seen as self-sacrifice since Aragorn puts his life in danger in hopes of allowing Frodo enough time to destroy the Ring and save Middle Earth; however, it is not just a sacrifice of himself, but it could be seen as a sacrifice of all the men in his army as well since he is leading them into immense danger. Aragorn, along with Gandalf, leads the nearly 6,000 men making up the Army of the West to the Black Gate of Mordor where they are met by the Messenger of Sauron, an evil man who "because of his cunning grew ever higher in the Lord's favour; and he learned great sorcery, and knew much of the mind of Sauron; and he was more cruel than any orc" (Tolkien 870). After some time of Aragorn and Gandalf negotiating with the Messenger, the Army of the West standing at their backs, the war breaks out. The Army of the West is slowly forcing the orcs to retreat back towards the Black Gate when the Nazgûl appear and cast a dark shadow upon the earth. Suddenly the Great Eagles of the Misty Mountains arrive:

Straight down upon the Nazgûl they bore, stooping suddenly out of the high airs, and the rush of their wide wings as they passed over was like a gale. But the Nazgûl turned and fled, and vanished into Mordor's shadows, hearing a sudden terrible call out of the Dark Tower; and even at that moment all the hosts of Mordor trembled, doubt clutched their hearts, their laughter failed, their hands shook and their limbs were loosened. The Power that drove them on and filled them with hate and fury was wavering, its will was removed

from them; and now looking in the eyes of their enemies they saw a deadly light and were afraid. (Tolkien 927)

The Army of the West were filled with new hope as they stood and waited. Finally, they saw the Black Gate crumble to ruin and heard Gandalf yell, “The realm of Sauron is ended... The Ring-bearer has fulfilled his Quest” (Tolkien 928)! Although it was incredibly dangerous for Aragorn to lead the Army to the Black Gate, there was no sacrifice made by him, certainly none that becomes symbolic. He did, however, successfully accomplish his mission of going into battle to allow Frodo more time to complete his journey. Because of this, Aragorn is a noble warrior rather than a Christ Figure. This battle is not the first that Aragorn has fought and he does not go into it intending to be sacrificed, his action is out of a sense of duty rather than sacrifice.

Kreeft is not completely wrong when he states that Gandalf and Aragorn resemble Christ at times through the novel, but it must be argued that Frodo’s entire journey to Mount Doom parallels Christ’s journey in *The Bible* while there are just glimpses of Christ in Gandalf and Aragorn, making Frodo the ultimate and only Christ Figure. Gandalf and Aragorn act heroically and selflessly throughout the trilogy, but acting selflessly does not make a figure Christ-like, it just makes him or her brave, heroic, or noble. If we consider every major character in the novel who sacrifices in any way, a Christ Figure, it completely adulterates the claim; all of them would be Christ Figures, which isn’t possible. Frodo’s journey in *The Lord of the Rings* directly parallels that of Christ’s in the Bible in many different ways. Frodo is given the burden of the Ring, much like Jesus carried his cross. Both Frodo and Christ were given a responsibility that would affect the world; if Frodo failed Sauron would once again claim the Ring and have rule over Middle Earth, and if Christ didn’t live a life without sin and die on the cross, no one would

be forgiven and the world would be condemned. Both scenarios end in the destruction of the world and no possibility for the redemption of man.

Kreeft is not the only critic who claims that Gandalf and Aragorn are the definitive Christ Figures in *The Lord of the Rings*. Emily McAvan, in her book *The Postmodern Sacred: Popular Culture Spirituality in the Science Fiction, Fantasy and Urban Fantasy Genres*, claims that “Tolkien’s Christ figures are unstable and partial” (116). By this, she is asserting that because she does not find there to be one single Christ Figure in Tolkien’s work, but elements in multiple different characters, they are therefore, essentially, incomplete or “partial.” McAvan begins her discussion with Gandalf, first stating, “In his return from death in the mines of Moria, and subsequent transformation from Grey to White, Gandalf recalls the resurrected Christ” (109). She proceeds to discuss the parallels that Gandalf’s death and return have with Christ, discussing when Legolas did not recognize Gandalf because “his hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand” (Tolkien 483-484). This moment is similar to the one written about in *The Bible* in the Gospel of Mark when Jesus takes three disciples to the mountain with him to pray, and “there he was transfigured before them. His clothing became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (*The Holy Bible* NIV, Mark 9:2-3). While this is a palpable connection between Gandalf and Christ, this is the only evidence McAvan provides to justify Gandalf as a Christ Figure. McAvan neglects to include that Gandalf states that he cannot touch the Ring; he says, “with that power I should have power too great and terrible. And over me the Ring would gain a power still greater and more deadly... The wish to wield it would be too great for my strength” (Tolkien 60). Gandalf himself admits that he is too

flawed to carry the Ring; it took a simple, pure creature – a hobbit – just like it took a sinless man – Christ, to bear the ring effectively.

McAvan then moves on to her discussion about Aragorn, stating that:

The most obviously apocalyptic coding of a Christ figure is Aragorn, the long-lost King of Gondor... The third book of the series is called *The Return of the King*, and it is this aspect that marks Aragorn as a Christ figure – specifically Christ as he appears at the end of time, post-apocalypse. This is a King who is returning, after all, not appearing for the first time. (McAvan 111)

This argument is basically the only point McAvan then offers as to why Aragorn is the “most obvious” Christ Figure; however she does not address the fact that there are many other Kings in Middle Earth who have equivalent titles to Aragorn. McAvan claims that it is simply because Aragorn is returning that he is the Christ Figure, but then that would infer that Aragorn’s role in the entire journey could be completely dismissed if there were any other King returning to his throne. She spends the rest of the section discussing Boromir’s death and Frodo’s journey, stating that Frodo is not a Christ Figure, but never provides any more explanation on then why Aragorn is.

McAvan finally moves on to her discussion of Frodo, comparing him to Christ in the sense that they are both pierced multiple times, Christ by the spears of the men persecuting him on the cross and Frodo by the swords of the Ringwraiths; but then, she asserts that Frodo is not a Christ Figure because in the end he falls victim to the power and pull of the Ring and struggles to destroy it. She ultimately compares him to Boromir. McAvan says that “the Ring has corrupted even the most humble and self-effacing of hobbits” (115). This point does not eliminate Frodo as the Christ Figure; Frodo’s moment of weakness in the end, after carrying the immense burden

and weight of the Ring, is brought on by the power of the Ring and in essence, the power of evil. Frodo, even as a “humble and self-effacing” hobbit, was unable to surmount sin and evil. When Frodo finally reaches Mount Doom, he struggles with destroying the Ring and is tempted to keep it for himself. Frodo wavers at the end when he contemplates keeping the Ring and is not without his suffering, but neither was Christ on the cross and therefore does not negate everything he’s done up to this point. As Jesus is hanging from the cross, after being harassed and doubted by all those around him, at “about three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eli, Eli, lemasabachthani?*’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’)” (*The Holy Bible* NIV, Matthew 27:26). Christ cries out to his Father, asking why he had deserted him in a moment akin to doubt; in this instance, Christ wavers, just like Frodo at Mount Doom. But neither Christ nor Frodo are vanquished and, ultimately, fulfill their missions.

McAvan is not the only critic with an interesting take on the Christ Figure in *The Lord of the Rings*. Joseph Pearce has a unique opinion on Frodo as a Christ Figure in his essay, “Christ,” in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment* where he claims that:

The centrality of the hidden presence of Christ is discernible most insistently in the date that Tolkien ascribes to the destruction of the Ring. In one of the appendices to the *Lord of the Rings*, he states that March 25 is “the date of the downfall of the Baraddûr”, adding that the New Year began on March 25, “in commemoration of the fall of Sauron and the deeds of the Ring-bearers”. This date is of singular significance in the Christian calendar... it is traditionally believed to be the date on which Christ’s crucifixion occurred. (98)

This connection is an incredibly fascinating one since this would imply that Tolkien, whether consciously or subconsciously, did incorporate religion into his work and that the connection

between the Christ Figure character of Frodo and Jesus Christ is even deeper than it might appear. Pearce's assertions do not stop there. He continues by drawing more conclusions, stating:

If the Ring is synonymous with sin in general and original sin in particular, the Christocentric aspects of the work become apparent. Frodo, as the Ring-bearer, emerges as a Christ Figure, the one who bears the Cross, and with it the sins and hopes of humanity... Although Frodo emerges as the most obvious Christ Figure insofar as he is the Ring-bearer and insofar as the Ring can be seen to signify sin. In every other respect, he is simply a hobbit of the Shire. He is not a figure of Christ at all times in the way that a character in a formal allegory is merely a personified abstraction of the thing or person he represents. (98).

Pearce acknowledges Frodo as a Christ Figure; however, he doesn't admit of his being a Christ Figure because he claims that Frodo "is not a figure of Christ at all times." Pearce's assertion that Frodo becomes "the most obvious Christ Figure" simply because he is the Ring-bearer is correct, but this is not the only conclusion that can be drawn as to why Frodo is a Christ Figure. Frodo's sacrifice is not just one aspect of his being a Christ-like Figure, but is central, because it includes others' faith in him and his ability to redeem them all. Pearce fails to look at Frodo's entire journey rather than just at him as the Ring-bearer.

Frodo's journey in *The Lord of the Rings* parallels that of Christ's in *The Bible* in many different ways. In *The Bible*, Christ's disciple John wrote about why God sent his only Son to earth and warns what would happen if we did not have faith in him:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not

condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (*The Holy Bible* NIV, John 3:16-18)

According to *The Bible*, God sent his Son, Jesus, to earth to live a life completely free of sin so that he might die on the cross and whoever believes in him will have everlasting life. Those who have accepted Christ into their hearts and believe that he died for their sins, will have eternal life and go to Heaven. Those who do not believe in Christ will be condemned to hell. Had Christ not died for our sins, everyone would be condemned and there would be no eternal life in Heaven.

The same idea of faith is key in Tolkien's fictional Middle Earth, far before the times of *The Hobbit*, Dark Lord Sauron reigned with his Ring and covered the land in darkness and evil, but he lost his Ring in a battle, and thus, his power. In the first book of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, "The Fellowship of the Ring" he begins to make his return. Gandalf tells Frodo:

The rumours that you have heard are true: he has indeed arisen again and left his hold in Mirkwood and returned to his ancient fastness in the Dark Tower of Mordor... The Enemy is fast becoming very strong. His plans are far from ripe, I think, but they are ripening... The Enemy still lacks one thing to give him strength and knowledge to beat down all resistance, break the last defences, and cover all the lands in a second darkness. He lacks the One Ring... If he recovers it, then he will command [all of the other rings] again, wherever they be... and all that has been wrought with them will be laid bare, and he will be stronger than ever. (50)

To ensure that Sauron does not reign darkness over Middle Earth again the Ring must be destroyed; however, it is far from a simple charge. The Dark Lord seeks the Ring "and all his thought is bent on it," and the Ring is also trying to get back to its master (Tolkien 51). The Ring can only be destroyed in the fires where it was created, Mount Doom, and the task is dangerous

because the Ring weakens any carrier who is not its master. The state of the world depends on the actions of Frodo Baggins and on the faith of others in him.

The necessity of both Christ and Frodo in the survival of their worlds is only the beginning of the parallel; both were innocent beings. Christ came to this world completely pure and free of sin. Frodo was a hobbit, a humble and peaceful creature, from the Shire, a utopia similar to the Garden of Eden. In a sense, a hobbit is the closest comparison to Christ in all of Middle Earth since they are a meek and unassuming creature by nature. In the book preceding *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien introduces the reader to hobbits:

They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it). (1-2)

They are clearly humble creatures, much like Christ, as he was a carpenter. Tolkien continues stating that hobbits are creatures of habit and do not stray from their homes, they are the opposite of adventurous-folk and do not know what goes on in Middle Earth outside of the Shire. From there, both Christ and Frodo become willing volunteers; in Christ's case, God sent him to earth to save man from his sins, but he knowingly accepts the task. Frodo, too, willingly steps out to

carry the Ring, but it was not simply an act of volunteering as it goes against his very nature, much like man's instinct for self-preservation. Gandalf says to him:

A Ring of power looks after itself, Frodo. *It* may slip off treacherously, but its keeper never abandons it... the Ring was trying to get back to its master... I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought. (Tolkien 54-55)

There is a higher power at work in *The Lord of the Rings*, opposite to the work God played in Christ's journey seeing as the Ring is possessed by evil forces, but it is similar because there is something greater at work, influencing events that determine the importance of Frodo to the journey and its success. Both Jesus and Frodo have followers; Christ has his disciples and Frodo has the Fellowship and both play important roles in each man's journey. Along with their companions, each has figures giving them guidance throughout their journey; Christ has God leading his way and Frodo has Gandalf, a wizard. Both need and rely on the support of these greater figures during their missions. Christ depends on God's guidance throughout his life as Frodo relies on Gandalf to lead the way to Mount Doom. Christ also keeps the company of twelve disciples who help to spread his message and heal people, similar to the company of nine that accompanies Frodo along his journey and protects him along the way.

While both Christ and Frodo have followers, they are each doubted even by their followers. Throughout Christ's life on earth, many doubted that he is the Son of God until they witness his miracles or listen to him speak. Though many people Christ encounters during his lifetime are transformed, there are still others who doubt him and, whether out of disbelief or fear, help him to be crucified. Though the doubt of Frodo is not as extreme, the Fellowship often doubts that Frodo's strength will be sustained on the journey or that he will be able to make it all

the way to Mount Doom. Sam believes that the Ring is wearing on Frodo and stripping his strength from him, he doesn't think that Frodo will be able to make it to Mount Doom on his own. In the second book of the trilogy, *The Two Towers*, Frodo and Sam break off from the rest of the Company and continue to Mount Doom by themselves. They find Gollum following them along their way and he becomes their guide. However, Sam does not trust Gollum and is worried that he will betray them, but that is not Sam's only worry:

Sam had another growing anxiety. Frodo seemed to be weary, wearing to the point of exhaustion. He said nothing, indeed he hardly spoke at all; and he did not complain, but he walked like one who carries a load, the weight of which is ever increasing; and he dragged along, slower and slower, so that Sam had often to beg Gollum to wait and not to leave their master behind. In fact with every step towards the gates of Mordor Frodo felt the Ring on its chain about his neck grow more burdensome... Sam's mind was occupied mostly with his master. (616)

Sam becomes increasingly worried that the Ring is taking far too big of a toll on Frodo as they get closer and closer to Mount Doom and he worries that Frodo will not be able to make it on his own. Though Sam is fearful that Frodo will be incapable of getting all the way to Mount Doom, Sam remains faithful to the bitter end and aids Frodo.

As Frodo gets closer and closer to Mount Doom, the Ring becomes heavier and heavier until he cannot go on any further and must be carried by Sam:

They had gone some miles, and the road was at last running down the long slope into the plain, when Frodo's strength began to give out and his will wavered. He lurched and stumbled. Desperately Sam tried to help him and hold him up... 'Come on, Mr. Frodo!' he whispered. 'One more crawl, and then you can lie still.' With a last despairing effort

Frodo raised himself on his hands, and struggled on for maybe twenty yards. Then he pitched down into a shallow pit that opened unexpectedly before them, and there he lay like a dead thing. (Tolkien 910-911)

This part of the journey is similar to the walk that Jesus makes, carrying the cross on his back that he is going to be crucified on, the weight of it becomes greater and greater as he gets further and further until he too can no longer carry it by himself and Simon of Cyrene has to help him. The soldiers “seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus” (*The Holy Bible NIV*, Luke 23:26).

The weight that both Frodo and Jesus are burdened with is caused by two very similar forces that threatened the known world. Frodo faces obstacles created by the Dark Lord Sauron who seeks to gain his Ring back so that he may rule all of Middle Earth; he sends his nine Black Riders, the Ringwraiths, to try to kill Frodo and take the Ring from him. Sauron is a parallel to Satan, who seeks to create evil, darkness, and chaos in the world, enslaving inhabitants. Jesus defeats Satan by dying for the sins of the world, like Frodo defeats Sauron by destroying the Ring. Both Frodo and Jesus are also tempted. In Matthew 4 in *The Bible* Jesus goes to the wilderness to be tested by the devil:

After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written: “‘He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’” Jesus answered him, “It is

also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.

“All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him. (*The Holy Bible* NIV, Matthew 4:1-11)

Christ is tempted multiple times and never succumbs and, like Christ, Frodo is tempted by the Ring. Throughout his expedition, the Ring tempts Frodo to put it on, but if he does Sauron will be able to see him; though Frodo realizes this and tries to restrain himself, he is often too weak and gives in, slipping on the Ring. At the end, when Frodo is at Mount Doom, he is tempted not to destroy the Ring, but to keep it for himself. He almost decides not to destroy it when Gollum appears and tries to take the Ring from Frodo. In their struggle for the Ring, Gollum falls into the pit of Mount Doom, to his death, with the Ring. Christ never gave in, the way Frodo almost does, but he does struggle with doubt before he dies.

Another parallel between Frodo and Christ concerns betrayal. Along both of their journeys, each is betrayed by someone close to him. In *The Fellowship of the Ring* Boromir, one of the two Men in the Fellowship, turns on Frodo under lust for the Ring. Boromir confronts Frodo:

Frodo looked up. His heart went suddenly cold. He caught the strange gleam in Boromir’s eyes, yet his face was still kind and friendly... [Boromir cried], “in our need chance brings to light the Ring of Power. It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it... The Ring would give me power of Command... Will you not at least let me make trial of my plan? Lend me the Ring!” ... Suddenly he sprang over the

stone and leaped at Frodo. His fair and pleasant face was hideously changed; a raging fire was in his eyes... [Boromir shouted], "Curse you and all Halflings to death and darkness!" (Tolkien 389-390)

Frodo flees before Boromir comes to his senses and realizes what he has done; he is overcome by the power and seduction of the Ring. The power of the Ring consumes and possesses Boromir. Similar to Judas, who was one of Christ's disciples and possessed by fear and Satan, betrayed Christ. In the Book of Luke, it is written, "Then Satan entered Judas... And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present" (*The Holy Bible NIV*, Luke 22:3-6). Judas, one of Christ's twelve disciples, betrays Christ and turns him over to be crucified under the evil influence of Satan; very similar to Boromir, one of the nine of the Fellowship, betraying Frodo under the intense power of the Ring.

Before Frodo can destroy the Ring though, he is stabbed by one of the Ringwraiths along the journey. Aragorn and the hobbits are at Weathertop when the Black Riders find them; in a panic, Frodo slips on the Ring and:

Their eyes fell on him and pierced him, as they rushed towards him... Two of the figures halted. The third was taller than the others: his hair was long and gleaming and on his helm was a crown. In one hand he held a long sword, and in the other a knife... He sprang forward and bore down on Frodo... A shrill cry rang out in the night; and he felt a pain like a dart of poisoned ice pierce his left shoulder. (Tolkien 191)

The leader of the Ringwraiths stabbing Frodo is analogous to Christ being stabbed after his crucifixion. After being hung on the cross, Jesus gives up his spirit and dies; when the soldiers

later come to break the legs of the men being crucified and find that Jesus is already dead “one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water” (*The Holy Bible* NIV, John 19:34). Both Frodo and Jesus are stabbed by evil men trying to stop them from accomplishing their mission, but despite these men, Frodo and Christ are able to accomplish what they set out to do. Frodo destroys the Ring and Christ saves man from his sins.

The events that take place after the Ring is destroyed and after Christ dies are also very similar. After the Ring is destroyed:

There was a roar and a great confusion of noise. Fires leaped up and licked the roof. The throbbing grew to a great tumult, and the Mountain shook... Towers fell and mountains slid; walls crumbled and melted, crashing down; vast spires of smoke and spouting steams went billowing up, up, until they toppled like an overwhelming wave, and its wild crest came foaming down upon the land. And then at last over the miles between there came a rumble, rising to a deafening crash and roar; the earth shook, the plain heaved and cracked... Fire belched from its riven summit. The skies burst into thunder seared with lightning. Down like lashing whips fell a torrent of black rain. (Tolkien 925-926)

This scene of destruction after the defeat of evil is similar to what happened in *The Bible* after Christ was crucified, thus defeating evil and sin. The book of Matthew tells that after Christ died on the cross, he gave up his spirit and “at that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus’ resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people” (*The Holy Bible* NIV, Matthew 27:51-53). The result of Frodo and Christ’s actions are extremely similar, in that the earth is destroyed and reborn in both cases, and after, Frodo and Sam have to be rescued from

Mount Doom by the Eagles. The hobbits all return to the Shire, but Frodo does not. Frodo goes to the undying lands, with the Elves and never returns home:

‘Where are you going, Master?’ cried Sam, though at last he understood what was happening. ‘To the Havens, Sam,’ said Frodo. ‘And I can’t come.’ ‘No, Sam. Not yet anyway, not further than the Havens’... Then Frodo kissed Merry and Pippin, and last of all Sam, and went aboard; the sails were drawn up, and the wind blew, and slowly the ship slipped away down the long grey firth; and the light of the glass of Galadriel that Frodo bore glimmered and was lost. (Tolkien 1006-7)

Once Frodo completes his mission and saves Middle Earth from evil, he never returns to the Shire; much like when Christ was resurrected and reborn after dying for the sins of mankind, he doesn’t return to Earth, but instead ascends up to Heaven in front of eleven of his disciples and joins his Father in Heaven. The words Heaven and Haven sound almost exactly the same which makes the connection impossible to miss.

The traditional definition of a Christ Figure “is merely a personified abstraction of the thing or person he represents” (Pearce 98). Often the Figure is shrewd, one who acts as a guide and ultimately makes a sacrifice for the good of all, drawing the illusion of Christ. However, in a modern sense, Christ Figures don’t always have to draw a literal illusion of Christ for them to be Christ Figures; Frodo is the perfect example of this. The connections between Frodo and Christ may not be overwhelmingly obvious until careful study of the trilogy and *The Bible*, looking closely at the journey of both Christ and Frodo. For this very reason, there is debate on whether or not Tolkien’s work is a religious allegory because the connections and metaphors are subtle and occur across three separate texts. People reading with limited knowledge of the Christian religion would most likely see no parallels between the main character and Christ; however, in

delving into the novel and looking at the journey of Frodo in comparison to the life of Christ, the parallels are rich.

Once we determine Frodo as the Christ Figure, it unconsciously and consciously alters the way we read Tolkien's work. A story about a mythical world, even not intended as a religious allegory, becomes embedded with Christian themes. The trilogy becomes not just a fascinating story, but analogous to *The Bible*. The journey to destroy the Ring becomes weighted with much greater meaning as we now see it as akin to Christ living a life free of sin to die on the cross for the sin of mankind. Frodo being the Ring-bearer becomes valiant and heroic as we see his quest as an act of willingly volunteering and sacrificing himself to save everyone in Middle Earth; his sacrifice ultimately holds more weight for the reader as it is now a direct parallel of the ultimate sacrifice known to man for a much worthier cause. The interpretation, too, gives the trilogy a much deeper meaning to Christian readers, especially; Tolkien's novels that appear to be riddled with evil and darkness, become significant and transcending as they are now interpreted as akin to the walk and life of their Savior, Jesus Christ.

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