

OTDK Dolgozat

2025

KODOLÁNYI JÁNOS EGYETEM

HUMÁNTUDOMÁNYI KAR



A KATOLIKUS HIT HATÁSA TOLKIEN TÜNDÉINEK HAGYOMÁNYKÖRÉRE

THE IMPACT OF CATHOLIC BELIEFS IN TOLKIEN'S ELVEN CUSTOMS

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Kézirat lezárásának dátuma: 2024.11.22.

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Introduction

In this research, I am going to examine whether J.R.R. Tolkien's Catholic faith influenced his tales, with a focus on Elves and their customs. Tolkien's devotion to Catholicism raised questions about how and where his belief impacted his legendarium. This points to the investigation of how Tolkien's devoutness translates into his Elven customs.

To begin with, I will dwell on Tolkien and his life. His letters will provide great insight into his life, despite the missing letters from his earlier years. His letters are collected in a book, titled *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, which was edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien. Some of Tolkien's letters will be used in this essay. His understanding and perception of the world he created will provide tremendous input to his works.

Furthermore, the history of Elves will also be highlighted. This section is important in understanding Elvish features and values. The Elven history is recorded in *The Silmarillion*. This book was posthumously published after Christopher Tolkien edited it. This work contains useful descriptions on how Elves came to be and how their conflicts changed influenced their lives. The downfall of Elves will also be mentioned as it was an important part of their history.

The fall of Elves will consist of the great battles Elves fought against the Enemy and each other. Their victories and losses will also be mentioned. This will provide information on Elven characteristics that will be essential for the present research. The understanding of Elvish traits will help illustrate their customs in another light.

The Road to Middle-earth, written by Tom Shippey, will also be mentioned in this essay as well. He gave a valuable insight on how Tolkien's Catholicism effected his legendarium. He examined several of J.R.R. Tolkien's books and other sources linked to Tolkien to solidify his argument that Tolkien was indeed influenced by his faith. Shippey in his book will talk about paradise lost and regained, how similar Tolkien's fall of Men is to the Old Testament. He also examines the seduction of Adam and Eve, Elvish origin and immortality, and the potential gift of death.

Another Tolkien scholar, Bradley Birzer's book will be mentioned, as well. *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth* explores Tolkien's intended, or unintended meaning of Middle-earth while incorporating Tolkien's social and political views. Birzer raises questions about the *Beowulf* and its possible influence on Tolkien, the fall of Men and the reasons for their fall. He also argues that Tolkien's life was shaped by Roman Catholicism and how it impacted his everyday life, which is verified by different accounts.

One of Tolkien's letters will also be included here which he wrote to his American publisher, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, regarding a questionnaire that was sent to him. His answers were cut up and put together in a way that bothered Tolkien. This letter will be important as Tolkien indicates that Christianity did indeed have some influence on his works.

The customs of Elves are found in the 10th volume of *The History of Middle-earth*, "Morgoth's Ring". The Elven customs are told by Ælfwine, whose character and role in Tolkien's legendarium will be mentioned. This study will address Elven marriages, their naming traditions, Elvish death and lastly, the customs of divorce. These topics will be compared to Christian, specifically Catholic rites and traditions.

Chapter 1

Influences On Tolkien's Life and Mythologies

As the present paper delves into the background of how J.R.R. Tolkien's Catholic beliefs and how this impacted the Elves, it is essential to talk about the author himself and his faith. The work will aim to give a comprehensive overview on how Tolkien came to create the Elves and their history. And later how this was influenced by the author's views and beliefs in his religion.

J.R.R. Tolkien followed the Roman Catholic faith, in his letter to Deborah Webster, in 1958, he explained: "*I am a Christian, (which can be deduced from my stories), and in fact a Roman Catholic.*" (Letters, no.213) Though I will not expand on the author's biography, there is a need to summon its knowledge of Tolkien's relationship to the Catholic faith.

Christianity is a world religion that has branches, where Roman Catholicism is one of the major groups. If we think broadly about what differs from the other Christian beliefs and Roman Catholicism, there are a few things to mention. The main differences are about the beliefs of sacraments, the role of the Bible, also its tradition, the significance of the Virgin Mary, the saints and the papacy. (Britannica)

Roman Catholics see the sacraments as a crucial part of their spirituality. They serve as an indefinite reminder of the relationship and union of God and Men. Roman Catholics honour seven sacraments. Baptism is an initiation ritual involving water. The confirmation is also a type of initiation that brings a person deeper into communion with the Church, but instead of water oils are used. (Britannica)

The Eucharist is a commemoration of the Last Supper. The confession involves the acknowledgment of sins either in public or private. Marriage is a union between man and woman blessed by God. And anointing of the sick means that the person who is severely ill or dying receives forgiveness and comfort. And lastly, the holy orders include men who are ordained as priests. (Britannica)

J.R.R. Tolkien became a Catholic after his mother Mabel left the Anglican Church and turned to Roman Catholicism. From then on Mabel had to work very hard to provide for her children. Father Francis Morgan, a priest, became the family's friend and helped where he could. Despite the support they received Mabel fell ill and died in 1904. In her will, she appointed Francis Morgan as her children's guardian. The boys spent a lot of their time in the Oratory listening to the early mass and participated in parish activities. (Tolkien Gateway)

Morgan's guardianship and the environment that he provided with the Oratory greatly impacted Tolkien. After the First World War, he returned to Oxford as a professor but was an active participant in the chaplaincy of the University and the Catholic communities of Oxford. During the years he lived in Oxford he attended early masses with his children, which caused tension between him and his wife. They reconciled later reaching a common ground. Humphrey Carpenter, the author of Tolkien's biography, describes Tolkien as someone deeply religious and his faith strongly influenced his persona. And this seeped into his imagination and later appeared in his works as well. (Tolkien Gateway)

When Tolkien was young, he started to imagine stories that could be connected to legends and myths. Ranging from smaller themes and ideas to much larger, cosmological ones. While he had a desire to link these narratives to Earth, he also wished these tales to possess mysticism and elusiveness. In his eyes, the legends he created should not be marred by evil but should be infused with poetry and art. He wanted these narratives to come together into a cycle that leaves others in awe and acts as a muse for artists. Later, he made up stories and legends to entertain his children. (Letters, no.131)

As the present work focuses on the Elves and their customs, we need to mention *The Silmarillion*, which discusses Elven history. The first draft dates to 1925, but Tolkien created some of its characters and themes even before, in 1917. Years later, after the success of *The Hobbit* (published in 1937), he submitted an incomplete version to his publisher, which was rejected. The reasons were it "being obscure and too Celtic". Tolkien never abandoned *The Silmarillion*, but he never finished writing and refining the plot. Unfortunately, he did not complete the revision of his script before he closed his eyes forever in 1973. (The One)

Christopher Tolkien, his son, edited and published almost all of J.R.R. Tolkien's mythos posthumously. Among these were *The Silmarillion*, which was released in 1977, and *The History of Middle-earth* series as well. The latter involves thirteen volumes and was published from 1983 to 2006. While *The Silmarillion* discusses the history of the Elves, there is a volume in *The History of Middle-earth* where Elven laws and customs are mentioned. (The One) The volume's title is *Morgoth's Ring*, and in the second phase of the book there is a chapter titled 'Laws and Customs among the Eldar'. In this section marriages, naming, death, re-birth, and, lastly, divorce of Elves is discussed by J.R.R. Tolkien himself. ("Morgoth's Ring", 207-227)

1.1. The Lore of the Elves

To understand the customs of the Elves, we must explore their history and character in greater depth. Tolkien's letters¹ helps to expand our understanding of Elves, though his earlier letters, dated from between 1918 and 1937, were lost. (Letters, Introduction) Despite the missing letters, in his later replies to his friends and publishers, he expresses his thoughts about the realms of Arda and its cosmological cycle in which Elves are interwoven.

Tolkien begins his essay with his cosmological myth: "The Music of the Ainur"². In this myth, he explains how God (Eru Illúvatar) made the Ainur² and created the Earth in the Void. (Letters, no.131) God did not create this alone but with the music produced by the Ainur. They sang in harmony to create the Great Music. Yet Eru arose three times and changed the theme, and only with the third variation was he satisfied. (*The Silmarillion*, 3-10)

In his letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien explains that the Creator (God or Eru) did not show a complete vision to the Valar, whom he called "gods". He also mentions that the knowledge of these 'gods' is incomplete as the Creator did not reveal everything that concerns the Children of Illúvatar. They only knew that they would come at an appointed time. Tolkien mentions that there are secrets pertaining to the Children of God. He explains that the Children are related yet different from each other. However, they share the love of gods, albeit on different levels. (Letters, no.131)

The Elves are called the First-born, and Men as Followers, and to each Eru gave gifts and dooms. The Elves are doomed to immortality, however through their gift they are able to see the beauty the world beholds and through their delicate perfection make the world bloom. To never leave this gift behind, they are to return time and time again. Nevertheless, when Men come, they will have to teach them. Then make way and fade with time as the Followers grow in power and presence. (Letters, no.131)

In his letter³ to Milton Waldman, Tolkien does mention that the cycle of the Eä (the Earth) is written down by Elves. It includes their view on how the world naturally flows. In this

1 Tolkien's letters were published by George Allen and Unwin, later by HarperCollins in the UK, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt in the U.S. The letters were collected by Humphrey Carpenter with the help of Christopher Tolkien. J.R.R. Tolkien's letters contain lots of information and insight on his legends and on his personal life as well. In this work his letters hold important insight concerning the Elves.

2 Ainur: important to note that there are two groups of Ainur, the Valar and the Maiar who are further discussed in *The Silmarillion* (pp. 13-19)

3 The letter is not dated, but was probably written in 1951 (Letters, no.131)

letter, it is also revealed that Men have one gift (or doom) that is envied and grieved by the Elves: mortality. (Letters, no.131)

There are three groups of Elves. They are the Elves who were willing to follow Oromë⁴, who had discovered the very first Elves after their awakening. They were the Vanyar, who in number were smaller, yet the king of this host was the most revered. His name is Ingwë, the King of the Fair Elves. The next host was led by Finwë, and their name was Noldor. They were praised for their wisdom. The Noldor were also known as the Deep Elves. And the biggest host was the Teleri, led by Olwë. They were also known as Sea-Elves. They followed Oromë and reached the shores of Aman and settled into their new realm. (*The Silmarillion*, 36-44)

The main plotline of *The Silmarillion* follows the fall of the most gifted of the Elves, the Noldor. They are exiled from Valinor in the West of Middle-earth, which, by that time, was ruled by the Enemy, Morgoth. The reason for the exile was Fëanor rebelling against the Valar after they demanded the Silmarills to be relinquished to them to remake the trees. (Letters, 131) The Two Trees of Valinor were the light source of Aman⁵, one emitted silver and the other a golden hue. This was pierced through by Morgoth and then drained by Ungoliant. The period of lost light was called the Darkening of Valinor. (*The Silmarillion*, 66)

Sometime before this event took place Fëanor captured the unsullied lights of the trees into three jewels. They were called the Silmarilli, meaning “radiance of pure light” and he gave these to his father, Finwë. The king of Noldor was meant to safekeep the jewels, but after Morgoth’s malice killed the lights Finwë followed. He also took all the treasures that the House of Fëanor had gathered during the years and fled to Middle-earth. There he settled into Angband and he cast the three, shining jewels into an iron crown which he never took off. (Letters, 131)

The fall of the Elves comes from the possessive attitude of the House of Fëanor. Fëanor himself and all seven of his sons swore an oath of vengeance against anyone and anything that dared to claim any right in the making of the Silmarills. This oath was seen as blasphemous as they defied the gods and rebelled against them and their order. With ambitious and cleverly formulated speech Fëanor and his sons were able to sway almost all of the Noldor to follow them on his path of revenge.

⁴ Oromë: a Vala, who is known for hunting (*The Silmarillion*, 17)

⁵ Aman: the home of the Valar and the high Elves, Valinor is located in the centre of it (*The Silmarillion* 303, 341)

1.2 Brief Summary of the “Quenta Silmarillion”⁶

As stated previously in the present paper, Elves and Men are similar, yet different. (Letters, 131) Through Elven history we see that even though Elves are wise and good, they display human characteristics. One of the major features is that Elves can be misled by others and cheated on by evil intentions, especially by Morgoth in *The Silmarillion*.

This is given prominence in the Quenta Silmarillion, which is the third, and longest part of *The Silmarillion*. According to Tolkien, said that *The Silmarillion* is the history of the War of Exiled Elves against the Enemy which takes place in Middle-earth. (Letters, 131)

The Quenta Silmarillion tells the story of the beginning of the Elves, their birth and what happened to them before meeting the Valar. The story also highlights how Melkor, later Morgoth, kidnapped some Elves to create his own creatures. This ended when the Valar chained Melkor and trusted Mandos to imprison him. (*The Silmarillion*, 23-44) The tale also accentuates the figure of Fëanor and the Silmarilli, and the jewels he created from the unsullied light of the trees of Valinor. (*The Silmarillion*, 57)

Later Melkor was released from his imprisonment and roamed free in Aman, however, he sowed his discord between the Noldorin Elves, especially between Fëanor and his step-brothers. Melkor created and spread rumours which caused a fall out in the family, but later the exiled Fëanor was called to reconcile with his brothers. (*The Silmarillion*, 63-67)

Parallel to these events, Melkor destroyed the trees and killed Finwë, Fëanor’s father, and took the Silmarilli. The sullyng of the trees prompted the Valar to demand the Silmarilli from Fëanor to remake the lights, however, the Elf refused. He pursued Melkor with his followers, after swearing a blasphemous oath. (*The Silmarillion*, 63-80)

The story also relates how the Noldor established their realms in Middle-earth. The Sindar Elves, who did not follow Oromë, had kingdoms in Beleriand, the Noldorin Elves took strategic locations which they defended as long as they could. (*The Silmarillion* 96-107)

There were many battles that the Elves fought against each other and the evil Morgoth. Some battles were victorious, some extremely tragic. After the destruction of the Sindarin realm, and the Noldorin realm, Doriath and Gondolin, with the remaining Elves, took refuge at “Sirion’s mouths” (*The Silmarillion*, 235). Here Eärendil’s longing for the sea grew and he frequently sailed the seas. He also searched for Aman, the Blessed Realm, to plead for help. He

⁶ Quenta Silmarillion: the third part of *The Silmarillion*, where alongside the Elves it also mentions Men and the details of Beleriand

finally succeeded and the final and greatest battle took place which changed the shape of Middle-earth forever. (*The Silmarillion*, 97-235)

The story ends with Morgoth being captured again. After the war most of the Elves went back to Aman, while some of them stayed behind. The Silmarilli were lost, whereby one was designated in the sky as a star, while the other two were lost in the earth and the sea. (*The Silmarillion*, 235-244)

1.3 *The Silmarillion* and Tolkien's Christianity

Tom Shippey's book, *The Road to Middle-earth*, delves into Tolkien's source of inspiration and creativity. He also discusses how *The Hobbit*, *The Silmarillion* and *The Unfinished Tales*, along with *The Lord of the Rings* were created and their contribution to the mythology of Tolkien. The author delves into the History of Middle-earth series as well, which was put together, edited, and published by J.R.R. Tolkien's son, Christopher Tolkien.

In chapter 7, "Visions and Revisions", the author starts with the explanation on why it took so long for *The Silmarillion* to be published. He mentioned that the time Tolkien wrote *The Silmarillion* was twice as long, then any of his other works. Shippey gives a lengthy explanation on the timeline of Tolkien's life and "*The Shaping of The Silmarillion*". (Shippey, 253-257)

In "Philological Inquires", the author calls *The Silmarillion* as a "calque" on the history of Genesis. Shippey supports his arguments by mentioning C.S. Lewis' *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, in which Lewis lists several, common principles of the Fall of Men. These doctrines appear in Tolkien's *Ainulindalë* and *Valaquenta* albeit with some changes. Lewis said that "God created all things without exception good" which Shippey linked to Melkor. Melkor had good intentions in the beginning, but was perverted into seeking more power and glory for himself by putting himself on a pedestal, trying to rebel against Eru. (Shippey, 267-268)

Shippey draws the conclusion that Lewis and Tolkien "co-operated on the analysis of Christian essentials". He brings up *The Silmarillion* to further establish his argument: "*The Silmarillion*, with its exile from paradise, its ages of misery, and its Intercessor, is a claue on Christian story, an answer to *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*." (Shippey, 268) Shippey then asks the question, if it can rival with the Christian story? Though Tolkien played with the thought, he eventually rejected the idea. However, Tolkien left a gap, or a "designed dovetail" as Shippey described, that linked Tolkien's Fall of Men to the Old Testament's description of the fall of men. In *The Silmarillion* Men come from the East where they most likely encountered

Morgoth and had no other choice but to flee. Shippey compares the exploit of Morgoth to the seduction of Adam and Eve by the serpent and the Edain and Easterlings to the descendants of Adam fleeing from Eden, who are subjected to the curse of Babel. (Shippey, 268)

Shippey goes on to say: “*The Silmarillion*, then, tells a story of the fall and partial redemption of the elves, without contradicting the story of the Fall and Redemption of Men.” (Shippey, 268) This means that both the fall of the Elves and Men are alike, whereby the pattern is similar, though still somewhat different. Shippey points out that Tolkien does not go against his already established doctrine, but with this similarity in structure he needed to introduce something novel. This novelty was Elven immortality. Tolkien’s Elves are not meant to die, because this is what differentiates them from Men and makes them “alien”. There is no need for them to be saved and their death is periodical as they re-embody after some time. (Shippey, 268-269)

The Silmarillion, in Shippey’s words, tries to persuade the reader that death is potentially a gift. This is represented in the tale of Beren and Lúthien, in which Lúthien alone was allowed to become a mortal and pass like one. This idea of death was something Tolkien was drawn to as he reached an advanced age. Shippey, after explaining the main difference in the pattern of fall of Men and Elves, points out that “the elvishness of the elves is meant to reflect back on the humanity of men”. (Shippey, 269)

This raised the question whether Elves have souls and whether they can be saved. Tolkien wished to create a middle path in which he did not deny orthodoxy and the “traditional allure of elves”. (Shippey, 270) Shippey mentions *The Early South English Legendary*, written in the Middle-ages, which could have been one of Tolkien’s sources. In the War of Heaven, the angels joined a side which they felt a pull toward. Those who felt inclined toward the devils were confined in tempests until Doomsday, when they go to Hell. Those who wavered towards God were sent to Earth, and when Doomsday happens, they are to return to Heaven. There are mentions of neutrals “doing their penance” on Earth, while the others are still in the Earthly Paradise. This sentiment can be found in *The Silmarillion*, as well. (Shippey, 270-271)

Tolkien did not accept the theory that Elves are angels, but rather the Elves he created are akin to fallen angels. Shippey mentioned a hierarchy which goes from the Valar, to Maiar, to Eldar. In *The Silmarillion* the likeness of the Ainur and the Elves are mentioned with greater detail, which supports Shippey’s theory that Elves are like fallen angels. Shippey brings Galadriel as an example: he questions whether she is a fallen angel. While he answers “No”, as Elves play no part in Tolkien’s War of Heaven, he acknowledges the fact that Galadriel has been expelled from “Heaven” and is prohibited from returning to Valinor. This can be seen in

the aforementioned *The Early South English Legendary*, as some Elves are still on Earth, in this case Middle-earth, making amends. (Shippey, 272)

Tolkien made use of the idea that Elves are angels, who were involved in a Fall and their fate at Doomsday is unclear, since they are not able to die and are in relation to Earthly Paradise. Shippey's final answer to the query whether Elves have souls is yes and no. To explain this he said, that Elvish souls are not free to leave the world, but their lives are not easy to lose either. Shippey, as a closing thought, stated that alongside the Genesis, Northern-folk traditions also helped frame *The Silmarillion*, which makes the story akin to an ancient text puzzle. (Shippey, 272-273)

1.4 Tolkien's Christian Influence on His Legendarium

Bradley Birzer in his book, *J.R.R. Tolkien's Sanctifying Myth*, explores the underlying meaning of Middle-earth, as well as Tolkien's social and political views.

In chapter 2, "Myth and Sub-creation", Birzer talks about Tolkien's critical essay on *Beowulf* which affected the way the poem was viewed and valued. Tolkien also emphasised that a theme should be implicit rather than explicit which is "*Beowulf's* greatest strength". (Tolkien, 1936) Birzer goes on to say: "morality in the fallen state of sin represents one of the most important themes of *Beowulf*" (Birzer, 34); and continues that for Tolkien the poet morality is "beautifully intertwined pagan virtues with Christian theology". (Birzer 34-35)

He speculates that the author most likely lived at a time when Christianity was slowly spreading. The poet most likely wanted to demonstrate that not all pagan things should be dismissed, some are worthy to keep, such as courage and will. The author said that Tolkien thought that "the sanctification of the pagan was an essential Christian project". (Birzer, 36) When Christianity was accepted as the main religion the understanding of "good" changed, while the understanding of "evil" remained the same. (Birzer 35-36)

Tolkien argued that as men are fallen and susceptible to pride, they can alter the higher calling and gift of creativity despite good intentions. In such cases, the creator "turns art into power" (Birzer, 39) and it serves only the creator himself, no one else. Birzer brings Fëanor as an example, who is the greatest of the Elves. He captured the lights of the trees, before they were destroyed by Melkor's malice. This left the "angelic powers" without light. (Birzer, 39) Fëanor, possessive of his creation, refuses to give the Silmarilli to the "angelic regents of earth". (Birzer 39) The author said that *eucharastrophe*, unexpected joy, rarely happens in our world, and one must be content with it, because it takes place once in a lifetime. (Birzer 39)

According to Birzer, “The ultimate fairy story, or true myth, then, is the reincarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ”. (Birzer, 39) He added that Tolkien claimed “God is the Lord, of angels, and of men- and of elves. Legends and history met and fused” (Tolkien, 1947); Birzer concludes with his own thoughts: “with the arrival of God in Time, and men has been blessed beyond earthly comprehension.” (Birzer, 40) Tolkien made similar arguments in the *History of Middle-earth*. Accordingly, God has an ability to enter his story through his Spirits, which reveals authority. However, this leaves the author outside, living independently of his work, while he also dwells in his story. (Birzer 39-40)

Tolkien revealed later that Middle-earth represented Christian Europe in a distant past, not recorded in history. He also noted that the Shire would be England, which proved that Tolkien indeed hoped that his legendarium would be a mythology for England. Birzer mentioned that: “Tolkien had further hoped to inscribe *The Silmarillion* to Queen Elizabeth II with the words: ‘The only thing in which your country is not rich is mythology.’” (Birzer 41)

In chapter 3, “The Created Order”, Birzer explained that Tolkien’s Roman Catholicism shaped his life. His faith inevitably affected his legendarium as well, which he confirms to a Jesuit friend: “a fundamentally religious and Catholic work: unconsciously as first, but consciously in the revision.” (Carpenter, Letters, no. 142) There are many accounts that prove Tolkien’s loyal faith to Catholicism, which was not merely intellectual as Birzer said. To prove his argument he quoted Sayer, who described Tolkien as “a devout and strict old-fashioned Catholic”. (Sayer, Recollections, 1999) Tolkien believed that God has given him a task in creating his legendarium and to record it. He also felt the difficulty of creating such world, because it had to stay consistent and religiously aligned with Christianity. Tolkien had a deep fear of his work being interpreted in the wrong way; the spiritual and moral elements that he carefully sowed into his work would be taken as pagan, “or, worse, as the herald of new religion.” (Birzer 45-47)

Later in the chapter, Birzer established that Tolkien was careful to make his own mythology as Christian as possible. He reasoning was that Tolkien felt a need to affirm his devout Catholicism, with an emphasis on the free will. “The Music of the Ainur”, or *Ainulindalë*, is a great example of this. Melkor goes against the will of Ilúvatar, or God, for his own benefit. He in the end did not succeed, as he is captured and thrown into the void. Despite this, his presence, or corruption, lingers in Middle-earth. This can be seen as the devil sows its discord to become more powerful and to diminish God’s presence as much as possible. Birzer then explains that *The Silmarillion* and *The History of Middle-earth* are tales that focus on the fall

from grace. He added that Tolkien beautifully described the fall of Satan, or Melkor. (Birzer, 54-55)

“Athrabeth Finrod Ah Andreth” is a complex discussion between an Elven King, Finrod, and Andreth, a wise woman, who loved Finrod’s younger brother. Tolkien feared that those who read this would think of this chapter as a parody of Christianity. His son, Christopher, who edited his later works, thought otherwise. He views this as an extension of the other existing works of the legendarium and saw this as a sort of hope or vision. Christopher Tolkien also mentioned that Arda is mainly Christian, to which Birzer alludes to Tolkien who explained that God “allowed the fall” (Birzer, 58) because it manifested as his own power over Satan and spread the faith of God. (Birzer, 56-58)

1.5 Peace After the Wars and Elven Beliefs

The history of Elves begins beautifully but ends in disaster. The oath of the sons of Fëanor became effective, and the lust for the jewels destroyed all the kingdoms of the Elves. In the end, the Silmarills were recovered by the sons of Fëanor, only to be lost forever due to their heinous deeds. The fate of the Silmarills was the following; one is in the sky, shining as a star, one is in the depth of Earth and the other is in the sea. (Letters, no.131)

Tolkien in his letter⁷ to his American publisher, Houghton Mifflin Co., responds to a New York Times column about his books. He was asked several questions which he needed to answer briefly and quotably. He sets facts right in his letter as the article cut up his answers. He also mentions that there was one criticism that annoyed him. The criticism was that his books “contained no religion”. He goes on to explain that the world his books are set in is monotheistic world, even though there are no temples, churches, religious rites or ceremonies. This would have been adequately explained if *The Silmarillion* and other tales of the First and Second Ages were published⁸. He also mentions that he is a follower of the Christian faith, “but the ‘Third Age’⁹ was not a Christian world.” (Letters, no.165)

This leads to the conclusion that the First and Second Ages were more Christian. Also, it is important to note that there is only one God, Eru, who created everything and everyone. (The Silmarillion, 3) This can be seen in the Bible as well, where it is suggested that God created

⁷ This letter was written on 5 June 1955

⁸ The bulk of J.R.R. Tolkien’s work was published after his death (The One)

⁹ Third Age refers to the time after Sauron is defeated by the Last Alliance and the journey of Bilbo Baggins and Frodo (Tolkien Gateway)

everything, including earth. (Gotquestions) This makes Tolkien's and our world similar in their making and in their religion, which is monotheistic.

Another example of Christianity in Tolkien's tales would be Gondolin. Gondolin was founded by Turgon, son of Fingolfin, in Beleriand. The city was well concealed in the valley of Tumladen¹⁰, its name, the Hidden City, came from its hidden location. The cause of the city's fall was Maeglin¹¹, nephew of Turgon. Maeglin fell in love with Idril, who was Turgon's daughter and later, Tuor's¹² wife. Idril avoided him as she felt darkness in Maeglin's heart, which grew darker as time went by. (*The Silmarillion*, 130)

When Eärendil was born, Maeglin felt lost as he was told not to wander outside the city anymore. He loved mining and took no heed of the ban that fell on the city. When he went out to seek metals he was captured by Orcs and brought to Angband. Morgoth lured Maeglin into treachery by false promises. The Enemy assured Maeglin that if he revealed the location of Gondolin he will have both the city and Idril in return. He made Maeglin return and act normal so as not to make anyone suspicious of their encounter. When the Fall of Gondolin took place, Maeglin laid hands on Idril and her son, Eärendil. But Tuor caught up with them and the two of them fought on the walls of the city. In the end, Maeglin lost and he was thrown from the walls to his death. (*The Silmarillion*, 231-232)

There are some parallels with cities mentioned in the Bible. Bethlehem would be one of the examples as Messiah, Jesus Christ, was born here. (Spiritual Thinking) Like how Eärendil who was born in Gondolin and later ran the errand of saving the Exiled Elves and Men from Morgoth. Also, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah shows that sins have severe consequences. This is similar to how Maeglin desired Idril, but could not have her and because of this, he betrayed his people. This betrayal led to the end of Gondolin. Tyre shows the downfall of wealth (Spiritual Thinking), which we can align with Gondolin. Turgon founded his city upon his memories of Tirion upon Túna¹³. (*The Silmarillion*, 105) Tirion was a wealthy city, with white walls and terraces, the sand in the streets was like diamond and white crystal stairs were seen above the gates. (Tolkien Gateway) Though the stories do not mirror each other, it can be said that they share similar values and lessons.

As we saw in the history of Elves, they are fundamentally different from Men. They are wise, and with further knowledge they become wiser. They are also immortal and good, for the

10 Tumladen: a hidden valley in the Encircling Mountains (*The Silmarillion*, 339)

11 Maeglin: son of Aredhel, Fingolfin's daughter, and Eöl, the Dark Elf (*The Silmarillion*, 122-125, 316)

12 Tuor: a Men, who married an Elven maiden, Idril, also father of Eärendil (*The Silmarillion*, 339)

13 Tirion upon Túna: largest settlement of Elves in Aman (Tolkien Gateway)

most part as previously presented. Their inherent difference translates into their customs as well, which are influenced by Tolkien's faith in Catholicism.

Chapter 2

Elven Customs in the View of Catholicism

This part of the paper details the customs of Elves and where they were impacted by Tolkien's Catholic beliefs. The "Laws and Customs of the Eldar" are told by Ælfwine in *Morgoth's Ring*. ("Morgoth's Ring", 207-209) The character of Ælfwine comes from an early concept of Tolkien's tales, and he fills the role of narrator. However, as Tolkien's legendarium grew this concept changed drastically. (Tolkien Gateway)

Ælfwine was the first Men to find his way to the road which leads to Aman and to visit Tol Eressëa after eons. He was born as an Anglo-Saxon and lived in Great Britain during the 10th century. His father sailed off on his ship and never returned when he was nine years old. After that, the attack of the Danes forced him and his mother to relocate from Somerset. They went to Wales, where his mother's kin lived. (Tolkien Gateway)

Ælfwine was described as Eärendil's descendant, who, like any other offspring, desired to be near the sea. Thus, he became a sailor, but he was also known as a singer. Later, when he entered adulthood and learnt the Welsh language along with the craft of sailing, he returned to Somerset. He served in the wars. He visited many places and sought out the tales of the sea. In autumn, the Danes attacked again and though Ælfwine and his company were driven off at first, they successfully captured the Danish boat. On the very same day, he told his friend, who sailed with him, that he wanted to sail off westwards. The friend and the other sailors agreed to accompany him. (Tolkien Gateway)

Many days passed and the sailors were exhausted. They soon passed out and the last thing they saw was that the world fell around them while their boat still sailed. When Ælfwine woke up on the shores of Tol Eressëa, he saw Elves pulling his ship ashore. He travelled to a village of the island where Pengolodh¹⁴ lived. He told Ælfwine about the "The Music of the Ainur" and showed the "Quenta Silmarillion", the Golden Book and a lot more to him. Ælfwine learnt a lot of the Elven lore and when he returned to England, he translated some of them into Old English. (Tolkien Gateway) *Morgoth's Ring*, and in it the "Laws and Customs of the Eldar" was probably one of them.

2.1 Elven Marriage Customs

¹⁴ Pengolodh: one of the lore-master of the Elves who lived in Gondolin (Tolkien Gateway)

The text starts with describing how Elves grew slower in body than Men, but in mind more swiftly. It also says that Elves gain their height and physique at the age of fifty, which would endure the time from then on. Soon after their fiftieth birthday was the time when Elves traditionally married. They also married once in their life, which was either out of love or if not out of love, it was their will to do so. Marriage, save for the ill-fated ones, was the natural course of life for all Elves. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 209-210)

Some steps needed to be taken for the Eldar to marry. Many of the Elves choose their partner in their youth, even as a child. If they were in no hurry and were of fitting age, the betrothal was determined by the parents. At a later date, the engagement was announced at a meeting of the two houses. The couple gave silver rings to one another at the meeting. The betrothment stood for at least one year, but often longer. During this time, it could be cancelled by either party with the public return of the rings. Then the returned rings would be melted together and would never be used again. It is essential to mention that the engagement was rarely annulled, because Elves hardly made errors in choosing their spouse. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 210-211)

It was the duty of the betrothed to assign a date for the wedding when, at least, a year had passed. Then the marriage was celebrated at a feast shared by the two houses. At the end of the banquet, the couple stood up. They were joined by the bride’s mother and the groom’s father, and they joined the pair’s hands and blessed them. Then the spouses give back their engagement ring to each other and store it as something precious. In exchange for the old ring, they gave a new one made from gold and wore it on the index finger of the right hand. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 211)

At the same time, these ceremonies were not necessary for marriage. The act of bodily union was pivotal to achieving marriage, and it made the unbreakable bond complete. But, in the early days of the Eldar, it was seen as impolite and disdainful to forgo ceremonies. When the time of exile came ceremonies without witnesses were often made. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 211-212)

2.1.1 Christian Views and Customs Concerning Marriage

The Catholic Church views marriage as a sacrament and a lifelong union between man and woman. This union is based on mutual love, respect, and support. It also says that the marriage is indissoluble, which means that it cannot be dissolved except by death. The Church

also says that sexual intimacy should only occur during marriage because it points to procreation and the shared love of the couple. (Spiritual Culture)

It is further explained that marriage is a conjugal union that is established as a never-ending and indissoluble partnership. This applies to two types of marriages; the one between unbaptized persons and the other between baptized persons. It is also stated that marriage is the pinnacle of creation. (Daily Bread)

Before the ceremony takes place there is a period, usually one year, during which the couple are engaged and plan their marriage. The priest, who serves as a guide, will set some rules. First, you will need to live apart for the duration of the engagement. Then, either of the couples may need to receive Confirmation. Confirmation is a rite during which a person chooses the Catholic religion after he or she is baptized. The necessity of this sacrament will be determined by the priest guiding the couple through the process. (theknot.com)

Rings that are exchanged during the marriage ceremony are a symbol of commitment. This tradition developed over time. Some historians believe the origin of wedding rings is rooted in the early Roman culture. Romans believed that circles represent everlasting love, so they gifted rings to signify not only betrothal but also their endless love. This custom spread in the Roman Empire while Christianity took hold. Later it was declared by a Pope that an engagement ring needed to be given to state marriage intent. (Christian Website)

In the Bible, wedding rings are akin to a contract between spouses. Rings can signify promises between a couple to love each other and remain faithful. Also, the imagery of rings, as they have no beginning or end, suggests the ideal lifelong faithfulness. Though this sentiment is popular, the Bible does not require a couple to use rings. However, it uses rings as a symbolical concept for everlasting love and covenant between people. And to embody the Bible's teachings of love, relationships and the blessedness of marriage. (Christian Website)

2.1.2 Similarities Between Elven and Catholic Marriages

Both the Elves and the Catholic Church believe that marriage is a lifelong commitment. We can say that Elven and Catholic customs mirror each other, despite their different view and treatment on death. While Elven marriage does not end when one of the spouses die, for Catholic spousal death annuls the marriage. Elves have different views on death as they "do not die" (Shippey, 269), which means that, in a Catholic sense, their marriage cannot be nullified.

Another similarity would be the existence of engagement rings which, again, reflect Catholicism. Both in Elven customs and the Catholic faith, it is seen as a nuptial agreement

between two persons (Christian Website). While Elves give a silver engagement ring and switch to a golden one after the marriage vows. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 211) To Catholics, the ring itself was symbolic with the meaning of everlasting love and commitment. (Christian Website) This means that both customs put some importance on rings, they are treated as a physical manifestation of the love the spouses feel for each other.

Both Catholicism and Elven customs are also concerned with love and respect in a marriage. Elves generally marry someone they love and remain married until the end of their lives which is reflected in Catholic teachings. Catholicism says that a marriage union is based on love and mutual respect. (Spiritual Culture) This can also be aligned with Elven marriage customs, as most Elves choose their partner early on. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 210) This gives them time to get to know their partner and to see if they are fit for each other. As Elves rarely made mistakes in choosing their partner (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 211), it can be said that almost all betrothed couples married each other after some time.

The period of betrothment is one year in both Catholicism and Elven customs. They both use this time to prepare for their wedding, albeit with a little bit of difference. Elves can delay their marriage, the least amount of time required was one year before the wedding which is the same time period for engagement. During this time the betrothed made sure to choose a date for the future wedding. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 211) Catholic couples use the one-year timeframe to plan their marriage and make the necessary steps for their union. (theknot.com) For Catholic marriages it is crucial that both spouses abide by their faith and rules imposed by the Church. If one of the spouses do not follow Catholicism, it is required for them to convert.

It can be said that there are many overlapping traditions between Catholicism and Elven customs, starting from the exchange of rings, to the values involving the marriage and spousal love, and betrothment.

2.2 Naming in Elven Customs

The tradition of naming was specific among the Noldor Elves. Soon after the birth of a child he was named first by his father. Then the father-name, as they called it, was announced to both sides of the family. This was done through a celebration, called “Name-making”. This name stood before any other the child later received in life and it could not be altered to any other name. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 214)

At one point, every child among the Noldor can choose a second name for themselves. This happened, usually, after the child’s tenth birthday. By this time the Elven children reached

the required individuality and could express themselves skilfully. The ceremony was called “Name-choosing”. These names were newly made and could hold no meaning at the time of its making. Later, however, there was an abundance of names the Elves could choose from and selected from it for their children. These names could be modified according to the current language changes. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 214-215)

These names, both the father-name and the chosen name, were true names, not nicknames. The difference between them was that the father-name was public, and known by everyone, while the chosen name was private. Chosen names were not secret, but they were treated preciously and were only shared with people who were close to the individual. The use of the chosen name, excluding family members, was a sign of close intimacy and love, if it was permitted by the person. However, it was seen insulting to use it without the approval of the individual.

There were other types of names Elves were given, which are called “given names”. One of them was called mother-names. Mothers of the children often gave them names based on their insight or foresight concerning their child. The children received their mother-name in the hour of their birth, which either indicated some special feature of the child or a foresight about the child’s fate. These names held power and were regarded as chosen names. They were also public names and were placed after the father-name. Any other given names were not true names, and were not recognised by the person they were given to. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 216)

In his notes, Christopher Tolkien added further valuable information on names. Elves seldom held the same name, as they attempted to mark individuality and they were “regarded as the property of those who first bore them.” (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 229) He also emphasised that the “Eldar did indeed believe in a special relation between a name of a person and his life and individuality.” (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 229)

2.2.1 Catholic Practices Concerning Names

Catholic views on naming are not written in stone, but some things that should be considered before the naming of the children. There are two points which the followers of the Catholic faith should think before giving a name to their child.

Catholics should choose names that are meaningful and have some connection to their faith. Nowadays, unfortunately, a child can be given any name of the parents choosing regardless of how ridiculous they sound or what they mean. As it is common for Catholic families to introduce all the names of their children, it is advised to choose a middle name in

moderation. It is also ill-advised to give an unknown saint's name to the child, as later they can be difficult to use. (Catholic Answers)

Consideration should be shown to the impact of a child's name. Certain names could lead to a child being made fun of if the parents are not careful. It is advised to think about the future influence the name can have on their child. (Catholic Answers)

There is also a Christian name given to the child, or an adult, after they are baptized. For common names, there are no explicit rules, but in Christian communities, the baptismal name is used as the common name. Other cultures, not inherently Catholic, can have different names for common and Christian names. They believe that the Christian name is the name used by God and it is used during the rites of the Church. It is seen as sacred and should not be forgotten by the individual in this life. (Christianity)

2.2.2 Common Practices in Elven and Catholic Naming

Both Elves and Catholic followers have a tradition to introduce themselves with their full "title". For Elves "full title" refers to the sequence of all the names that were obtained throughout the life of Elves. In the title, nicknames or given names were seldom used, only if the individual adopted them. ("Morgoth's Ring", 215-216) The Catholics however list all their given names, usually middle names, that has some connection to their faith. (Catholic Answers) If one starts to follow the Catholic Church later in life they can obtain a Christian name – it is especially true for individuals that are not from Christian communities, or Christian countries that have common names rooted in Christianity. (Christianity)

Another similarity would be the impact of names, that needs to be considered before the child's birth. The followers of the Catholic faith are advised to choose names with the child's future in mind. (Catholic Answers) For Elves names are usually considered and given after birth, and they aim to mark a child's individuality or a characteristic that will be their strength, or be known by it.

A good example of the importance of naming would be Fëanor. His father-name is Curufinwë. This means skilful son of Finwë, which points at his achievements as a lore-master and craftsman. He was also referred to as the greatest craftsman of the Noldor. His mother-name is Fëanáro (or Fëanor) means Spirit of fire. (The One) His mother-name shows that he had a fiery persona, and no one could stand in his way unless they wanted to be burned. His fiery characteristic came out during his pursuit of Orcs after being ambushed by them (*The Silmarillion*, 96-67), and how fire consumed his body later. (*The Silmarillion*, 98)

One may rightly say that both Elves and Catholic followers have a list of names that hold significance to them one way or another. Though the influence of the names is treated differently in Elven and Catholic culture, it can be said that they both think about the gravity names hold.

2.3 Elven View of Death

It is important to note that Elves are immortal according to their nature. Elven spirits dwell in a body. The spirit of Elves cannot be broken or split into pieces, but their body can be hurt and destroyed. If the pain of their body is great, then their spirit will depart from it and become invisible to the eyes of others. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 218)

In the beginning, Elves believed that after the death of the body their spirit “entered into Nothing”. They also thought that they died like other living beings. Later, after they travelled to Aman, they learnt that their fate was to inhabit the Earth until its end. Which meant that their spirits remained in the Earth despite the destruction of their body. As soon as an Elven body dies their spirits are summoned. The so called “houseless” spirits went to the “Halls of Waiting”, in the realm of the Valar. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 219)

The spirits were judged by Námo¹⁵, also called Mandos. The length of time a spirits dwelt in his Halls was partly his will, and partly the Elves will. After a certain amount of time passed Elves were re-born in hopes of that their sufferings could be mended. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 219)

2.3.1 Catholic View on Death

Even though death is seen as something scary, Catholic teachings say that it is not the end of a man’s existence. Life is seen as an adventure and a chance to follow God and his teachings. When we die our journey does not end, but changes its course. (Catholic Share)

The Catholic Church explains that immediately after death each person will receive a judgment. It is an individual and immediate judgement by God where the fate of a person is decided. God will determine if someone goes to Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory. (Catholic Share)

The followers of the Catholic faith aim to enter Heaven after death. It is depicted as an eternal union with God where a person only experiences happiness and satisfaction. Those who

¹⁵ Námo: or Mandos is a Vala, the keeper of the dead (Tolkien Gateway)

separate themselves from God are destined to go to Hell. Contrary to popular beliefs, God does not send people to Hell, only those go there who walk away from him. Purgatory is another misunderstood place. It does not offer another chance for people. Purification is needed for those who “died in God’s grace” but could not enter Heaven yet. It is seen as a cleansing process before entering Heaven. (Catholic Share)

Catholic believers think that their bodies will be resurrected at one point. The resurrection takes place at the end of time after receiving the “Last Judgement”. Because of this death and afterlife is looked forward with hope and not fear. (Catholic Share)

2.3.2 Similarities Between Elvish and Catholic View on Death

Both the Elves and the Catholic hold a belief that one’s existence does not end after death. Catholicism sees life as a journey, while death as another, but in the afterlife. (Catholic Share) This is mirrored in Elven traditions, because even after their body decays, their spirits live on. A difference may be that Elvish souls remained on Earth (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 219), while Catholicism believes that a men’s soul either enters Heaven, Hell, or Purgatory depending on God’s judgment.

Another similarity is that both the spirits of Elves and the souls of men are judged after their death. The Elves are judged by Námo and remain in his Halls of Waiting for a specific amount of time. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 219) While men are judged immediately after death by God which decides their fate. Men can either enter Heaven, Hell, or the Purgatory for cleansing. (Christian Share) This means that both the Elves and men are judged and made to enter another domain after their death.

Tom Shippey’s dilemma whether the Elves have souls solicits an answer of a yes and a no. His no answer is based on the fact that Elvish souls do not leave Earth, while, in Catholicism, the souls of human beings do and enter into another domain, presumably not on Earth. Elves enter the Halls of Mandos, which he calls a “Limbo” to wait for their re-embodiment. Another query of Shippey’s is that Elves fell and that their fate at Doomsday is not clear. (Shippey, 272)

Despite this, Elves share similar beliefs with the concept of resurrection read in the Bible. Elves call this re-birth and place hope in it to atone for their sufferings. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 219) Catholics believe that they will be resurrected at some point and receive the “Last Judgement”. Because of how death and the afterlife are seen in Catholicism, it is viewed with hope. (Catholic Share)

2.4 Elven Customs Concerning Divorce

Death was one of the griefs Elves experienced and it inevitably raised the question of what will happen to those who married before when one or both spouses die. Elves were in doubt as permanent marriage was in accordance with Elven nature. To ease their doubts, they turned to the Valar for guidance. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 225)

Since Elves are a permanent part of Arda so is their marriage. Marriage is not only the union of the body, though it contributes to it, but the eternal bond of the spirit and body of Elves. If one of the partners dies, their marriage is only suspended but does not end. Those who were married but later were separated are still a union by their spirit’s will. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 225-226)

This raised the question of how a marriage can be dissolved. Because by their nature Elven men and women are equal and can be in union with only one person. Then ending of a marriage can happen when the spirit is not willing to return to life or they are doomed and not permitted to return to life. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 226)

Another question followed: how will the Elves know the will or the doom. Manwë will pronounce his judgment through Námo. The Elves are not allowed to make judgment in this case. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 226)

What does achieve marriage through not only the body, but both the spirit and body mean. The answer to this question is that marriage relies on the bodily union of the couple, mainly for childbearing. The union of bodies is also special and unlike any other connection. While the union of spirits is different as it offers closeness and permanence for the couple. This means that marriage also concerns the spirits as well. The love spouses feel for each other arises from their like-mindedness. This love also comes with the desire to marry the other person. It can be said that marriage starts from the spirits and is fulfilled in the body. And for the reasons listed above marriage cannot be terminated and is eternal. (“Morgoth’s Ring, 226-227”)

This led to the Elves seeking an answer to what if the Elves wanted to marry again after one of the spouses died. As it was established before, that marriage ultimately is the choice of the spirit. If the couple wishes to continue their marital union after they are re-born then they may do so. It is also important to note, that sundered spirits are not allowed to return until they want to continue their life before their death. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 227)

2.4.1 Catholic Practices Concerning Divorce

Divorce is not possible in the eyes of the Catholic Church. The reason for this is because after marriage the couple is seen as one, not two independent individuals. They also emphasise that a consummated marriage cannot be broken by human means or for any other reason other than death. (Catholic Answers)

Even though the Church grants annulment it is not the same as divorce. Annulment recognises that there was no real marital union, while divorce breaks the real union. Those who have their marriage annulled were never bound in marriage, and because of this, they are free to marry despite the civil divorce. Yet those who divorce are seen as adulterous. The Church also says that divorce is a grave offence against God's will. And that the desire for the dissolution of marriage is seen as contagious. It is compared to the plague. (Catholic Answers)

The Catholic Church sees divorce and separation as different things. While divorce is seen as an attempt to break a marriage, separation is viewed as the halting of the couple's cohabitation. If the couple maintains their marriage bond separation is seen as lawful in certain cases. The Church lists physical and mental danger as a reason for separation along with adultery. Conjugal living has to be restored when the cause of separation ceases, unless the bishop says otherwise. (Catholic Answers)

This means that, Catholic couples usually try to solve the problems that arise in their marriage to avoid divorce. If the marriage is irreparably broken the couple apply for a civil divorce, but they will be unable to marry again in the eyes of the Church. (BBC News)

There are cases when a couple is granted annulment. Certain conditions must be applied to a marriage for it to be valid. The couple must marry without being forced to do so and without any doubt. They must love and respect each other for the remainder of their lives together. And they must accept children granted by God. (BBC News)

If any of these conditions are not met by the couple in their marriage, then one or both can ask for annulment. The marriage thus can be declared null and void, like it never happened. If the decree of nullity is granted, then the former couple are free to remarry and can do so in church. (BBC News)

2.4.2 Similarities Between Elven and Catholic Divorce

Both Elven customs and Catholic beliefs see marriage as a permanent union. This union is also seen as permanent, and as a bond that cannot be broken. As Elven life never ends, their

marriage is seen as the same, never-ending. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 225-226) Catholicism also says that marriage cannot be broken as the couple is not seen as individuals, but as one entity. (Catholic Answers)

Both Elves and men put emphasis on the consummation of the marriage. Elven marriages rely heavily on the bodily union of a couple, though they believe that the desire for marriage comes from their spirit and their body. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 226-227) The Church, on the other hand, says that if a marriage is consummated then it cannot be broken, only by the death of a spouse. (Catholic Answers) This means that both Elves and men believe that their marriage will last as it is a union that cannot be broken by any means. Especially not if the matrimony is consummated.

Both the Church and the Elves see marriage as indissoluble. Though Elves marry the person their spirit desires, the will of the spirit can, however, change. The change is the choice of the Elven spirit, who are in the Halls of Waiting, are not allowed to return. That is until they wish to continue their life where they left it. (“Morgoth’s Ring”, 227) This means that if they do not wish to continue their marriage with their partner, they may never return from the Halls of Waiting, a place where the houseless spirits dwell.¹⁶

The Catholic Church says not only that the spouses who marry become one entity, as it was mentioned before. It also declared that anyone who divorces is adulterous. It is seen as a grave offence against God and his will. (Catholic Answers) If, by any chance, a married couple divorces they cannot marry again in the eyes of the Church. (BBC News)

Based on the previous evidence it can be said that, though seen from different perspectives, divorce is seen as something unnatural in both traditions. In their eyes, marriage lasts not only for a lifetime but even after, and divorce is considered wrong.

¹⁶ Halls of Waiting was mentioned on page 219 in “Morgoth’s Ring”

Conclusion

The present research investigated how J.R.R. Tolkien's Catholic faith influenced his works, especially the Elven customs. I have found that there are several similarities or similar principles in Elven traditions that can be paralleled with Catholicism.

The focus fell on four topics, namely marriage, naming or christening, death and divorce. With marriage the similarities lie in how both traditions see it as a lifelong commitment to each other, despite the small difference on how death is viewed in a union. The existence of endearment rings, their use, and the value placed on them are another thing that corresponds with Catholicism. There is an emphasis on love and respect in marriage, and that these feelings should be the basis of marriage. The period of betrothment is one year in both cases and both the Elves and Catholics use this time to prepare for their wedding, although there are little differences.

Naming, or christening for Catholics, carried similar values and practices. Both Elves and Catholics introduce themselves with their list of names. Another crucial thing was to consider the impact of names in the future for both customs. For Catholics, names that are common and easier to use and memorise should be considered as a means to avoid unnecessary hardships in the child's future. For Elves names are aimed to show a person's individuality and strength. Both Elven and Catholic traditions regard names as significant and influential in their own way.

The theme of death was intriguing as Elves do not die as mortal Men do. Still, there were parallels between Elvish and Christian views on death and the afterlife. They both believed that life does not end when someone dies. Life is treated as a journey by both Elves and Catholics that simply changes its course after the person's passing. Another aspect that resembled each other would be the act of judgment: Elves are judged by Námo, who will determine how much time they will spend in his domain, while Catholics are judged by God who sends them to either Heaven, Hell, or the Purgatory.

Divorce was seen as indissoluble, especially after the consummation of marriage. The consummation is seen as the union being complete, which can only be broken if one of the spouses die. Besides death, both the Catholics and the Elves saw marriage as a bond that cannot be broken by any means and divorce was seen as unnatural. Elven marriages cannot be broken up, unless they are permitted by the Valar, while Catholic marriages can be nullified if the Church have evidence on adultery. Otherwise, the Church will try to reconcile the spouses, often advising them to separate for the time being. Though the Catholic and the Elves hold

different perspectives in their view of divorce, they agree that dissolving a marriage is a difficult decision that faces many consequences.

This study was essential in our understanding that an author's background and beliefs heavily impact their imagination. Whether the influence of Tolkien's faith was intentional or not, it can be said that his faith heavily affected his characters and their surroundings as the present work gave evidence through an analysis of specific examples.

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