Author's Preface

Amidst themes of discordance, order, and harmony, Tolkien sought to juxtapose beauty and ugliness, unity and difference, perfection in God and a lapse from that transcendent ideal, in order to offer a philosophy of creation in a carefully crafted narrative. Tolkien begins his entire corpus with a cosmogonic drama, Neoplatonic in its stylizing of whirling stars in planetary motions, producing cycles of 'awareness' from eternity to finitude. There is here an ideal in God's unity and simplicity, but much is lost as temporality proceeds from the cosmic drama into reality and experience.

The cultural interplay between Tolkien and contemporaries such as Eliot, Britten and Chesterton, alongside his well-documented literary interchange with his friends in The Inklings, sets Tolkien amongst an intellectual and cultural *milieu* which was striving to bring meaning, enchantment, and wonder out of the mythology and biblical imagery of the English literary canon on the one hand, and the horror and disillusion caused by the Great War on the other.

Tolkien has been included as one of a number of those 'traumatised authors' writing fantasy, but voicing in that fantasy "the most pressing and immediate relevant issues of the whole monstrous twentieth century."[1] One might ask, why can't Tolkien's Middle-earth writings be simply what they are—fantasy—a story of journey and quest, of brotherhood and friendships forged in the face of adversity? The answer is quite straight forward: for the author, written into that fantasy are things which are, at an altogether different level, very real. Tolkien utilizes a variety of resources with which he constructs a world of imagination, enchantment, *and* reality. This reality points to what things are in their relation to God: being and gift. Things are what they are/are not (ontologically and meontologically)

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1. Tom Shippey, *Road to Middle Earth*, xix.

precisely because something has willed that they be so, and are ordered hierarchically in a great chain of being.

This book explores these themes, alongside the challenges of evil and suffering, in the face of a wide-ranging breadth of scholarship, which finds its origins in Plato and his contemporaries, but also in how their ideas were absorbed in the Christian Neoplatonic tradition. This study offers original insights into previously unpublished Middle-earth texts of Tolkien, available in print for the first time, alongside his own unpublished textual notes on Anglo-Saxon poems such as *Beowulf* and *Pearl*. I have sought to keep in mind Tolkien's original project, in creating a mythology for England, but imbued also with the Catholic mindset of his generation.