

# EVANGELIZING ELVES

## INSIGHTS ON THE NEW EVANGELIZATION FROM J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S 'THE LORD OF THE RINGS.'

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### 1. HOBBITS.

#### a. Middle Earth Context:

- i. Peaceful, agrarian, somewhat “comfortable” race of Middle Earth, who inhabit the serene out-of-the way province known as the Shire. Due to their stature, they are referred to by other races by the (pejorative) “halflings.”<sup>1</sup>
- ii. Of course, Bilbo Baggins, the hero of *The Hobbit* is a hobbit, as are his nephew Frodo, and Sam, Merry and Pippin in *The Lord of the Rings*.
- iii. Positively, hobbits are simple folk, in the best sense of the word; industrious creatures who “work with their hands,” they love to eat, drink, laugh and smoke “pipe weed.” Most are farmers, craftsmen, shopkeepers and the like. Their life, work, and family are closely interwoven. They are loyal, hard-working and peace-loving.
- iv. Negatively, hobbits can be naïve, gullible, self-centered, gluttonous and at times, crude. They can be short-sighted, and motivated by fear. Although hobbits prefer to keep things “the way they’ve always been” and are distrustful of outsiders, when thrust out of the comfort zone of the Shire, they can summon great bravery, skill and selflessness.

#### b. Real World Context:

- i. Many Catholics are like the Hobbits. They think of themselves as “good people” and in many ways, they are. Yet, their Catholicism is of an *ancestral* sort—resting in a stagnant and fragile manner on the parents or even grandparents more fervent devotion.
- ii. Catholic Hobbits may attend Mass regularly. Yet, they exit the sanctuary as soon as the closing hymn ends (if not before), and don’t return until the

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<sup>1</sup> See: Robert Foster, *Tolkien's World from A to Z. The Complete Guide to Middle Earth* (New York: Del Ray, 2001),

following Sunday. They send their kids to Catholic schools and generally follow a moral compass.

- iii. Yet, they play it safe, and do not often look for Christ outside of their comfort zones. Instead, they withdrawal what little remains in their ancestral-faith bank account, rather than mining for spiritual gold.
- iv. Where do we find “Catholic Hobbits?” They are likely the ‘race’ we’re most likely to meet as they’re all around us: family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, other soccer dads.
- v. They identify themselves as Catholics, i.e., in terms of “religious affiliation.”<sup>2</sup> And yet, their faith is stagnant, dry. Their experience of Catholicism is *non-participatory*. Spiritually, they don’t give much thought to the homily—even if it’s a stirring one—nor do they sing, read, or engage their faith beyond what’s given to them in the Liturgy.
- vi. Catholic Hobbits are not necessarily discontented with their parish or the Church. Truth be told, *they don’t think much of Catholicism at all*. Their prayer life consists primarily of Sunday Mass and perhaps grace before meals.
- vii. Spiritually, they hardly ever leave the comfort of the Shire. (“Why bother? It’ll be so crowded with the pope there and all.” Etc.)
- viii. Some of the biggest spiritual obstacles of “Catholic Hobbits” are *complacency*, *fear*, and a *litany of excuses*:
  - “[Jesus] said to him, “A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for all is now ready.’ *But they all alike began to make excuses*. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, *have me excused*.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, *have me excused*.’ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore *I cannot come*.”

c. **Evangelizing Hobbits 2.0:**

- i. *Start by entering their world!* Invite them (!) beyond the Shire. Bear in mind that they may not *ever* join you a talk by Scott Hahn, or attend the diocesan men’s. So, go to them. Let them see and hear of the “Perilous Realm” they avoid—and witness to the goodness, truth and beauty that await them beyond the comfort of the Shire.
- ii. Spend time with them—sharing simple meals, celebrating holidays, and cheering together at the kids’ tournaments. When possible, *get beyond small talk*. You don’t (necessarily) have to mention “God / Church / Jesus / Eucharist,” but seek *substance over superficiality* and *loving over lounging*.

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<sup>2</sup> “The share of U.S. adults who say they believe in God, while still remarkably high by comparison with other advanced industrial countries, has declined modestly, from approximately 92% to 89%, since Pew Research Center conducted its first Landscape Study in 2007.” See: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious/> .

- iii. *Build relationships*—and allow the Holy Spirit to work through these experiences. Don't "strategize"—be yourself. Look for opportunities to share your stories from *beyond the Shire*, and how you made it "there and back again."
- iv. Finally, don't be afraid to "strike out" with them with an occasional invitation. At times, Catholic Hobbits *do* become inspired—but the enthusiasm quickly fades. We need to encourage them to *concretize such feelings* and *step out*. Encourage them to go beyond their comfort zones and to take spiritual risks.
- v. They may well say "no thanks," politely and often (in true Hobbit-fashion). Yet, but if done respectfully, and not excessively or awkwardly, they may appreciate it—and possibly take you up on it one day.
  - C.S. Lewis: "Look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him, everything else thrown in" (*Mere Christianity*).
  - Saint Pope John Paul II: "At the beginning of the new millennium ... a new stage of the Church's journey begins, our hearts ring out with the words of Jesus when one day, after speaking to the crowds from Simon's boat, he invited the Apostle to 'put out into the deep' for a catch: '*Duc in altum*' ... Now we must look ahead, we must 'put out into the deep,' trusting in Christ's words: *Duc in altum!* What we have done this year cannot justify *a sense of complacency*, and still less should it lead us to relax our commitment. On the contrary, [our] experiences ... should *inspire in us new energy*, and impel us to invest in *concrete initiatives* the enthusiasm which we have felt" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, §1, 15).<sup>3</sup>

## 2. EVANGELIZING DWARVES

### a. Middle Earth Context:

- i. In *The Silmarillion*, Eru Ilúvatar created elves and men—the Children of Ilúvatar. Prior to their "awakening," Ilúvatar created the Ainur, angelic spirits. Fourteen of which, known as the Valar, were given special "co-creative" roles. The Valar's co-creative role parallels the *logos* of Platonic philosophy.<sup>4</sup>
- ii. Though the Valar were loyal to Ilúvatar, a key exception was Melkor, whose disobedience recalls Satan. Melkor introduced a "discordant note" into Ilúvatar music of Creation—and so Melkor's rebellion began.
- iii. A minor rebellion was rendered by Aüle, another of the Valar. Impatient with the Children of Ilúvatar, Aüle creates the race of Dwarves of his own accord.<sup>5</sup> Aüle gave the Dwarves great courage, and pride and skill in craftsmanship.

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<sup>3</sup> Available here: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html).

<sup>4</sup> The Valar were angelic beings. Even so, their "co-creative" role under Ilúvatar's direction and command calls to mind Adam's role in *Genesis 2*, as he "names" the animals and governs the Creation as God's co-regent.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle Earth*, 35.

- iv. The Dwarves excelled as smiths & miners. While Ilúvatar did not prevent their creation by Aüle, he limited their physical stature, their defining characteristic.
  - v. Because of the circumstances of their origin, there existed great tensions between Dwarves and Elves and a mutual distrust formed between them.<sup>6</sup>
  - vi. The Dwarves have several things in common with the Hobbits: (1) both are small in stature; (2) all things being equal, both races prefer not to get involved in the affairs of the world, beyond their respective “walls.”
  - vii. A key difference that characterizes the Dwarves, however, is a kind of “tribal pride”—in their work (especially) and in other accomplishments. In contrast, while the Hobbits are often “busy about their work,” for the Hobbits, such non-engagement is born of a sort of naivete and pacifism.
  - viii. The Dwarves are a bit different: their non-engagement with the world beyond their mines is *not* because they’ve never ventured beyond it—they have. It is because they simply prefer their work and their own interests over others.
  - ix. One might say the Hobbits prefer a comfortable life of farming, pipe weed and laughter in their secluded Shire—but the Dwarves seek to protect their “gold” and build their own “kingdoms.”
  - x. As far as the analogy is concerned, “Catholic Hobbits” are polite and comfortable, who, as we learned above, do not take spiritual risks and do not reap the rewards. In contrast, “Catholic Dwarves” do take more risks and step out of their comfort zone. Unfortunately, an inordinate amount of their time and energy are driven by work (or other similar obligations).
- b. **Real World Context:**
- i. What do ‘real world Dwarves’ look like? They are *work-focused*—not just “work-a-day-world” folks, but people whose lives are unduly “ordered” around their jobs. They are deeply preoccupied with “getting ahead,” “expanding their business,” “pleasing their boss,” and / or “finding more gold.” Here is a profile of some Dwarves of contemporary culture:
    - Some are all-out workaholics, who eat, sleep & breathe work. (Come across two people suffering from “work fixation syndrome” and good luck prying them apart!) They’re addicted to the “rush” of their jobs and hardly *anything else* that does not pertain to their work. They’ve got a 10-year plan for growing their division, making partner, or enjoying all of the “gold” they mined, but haven’t got a clue about things that really matter, e.g., their spouses, kids or *getting to heaven*.
    - Other Dwarves are not addicted to work as much as they are “numbed” by the monotonous cycle (eat / commute / work / sleep). There is an *emptiness* in their hearts never filled by work. Their solace is not in faith, church or worship but in material things, weekend thrills, or addictions (sports-mania, entertainment, gambling). They live for their time-off.

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<sup>6</sup> Given this, the collaboration and eventual friendship of Legalos and Gimli is particularly striking.

- Still others are not addicted or numbed by work; they feel *imprisoned* by it. Their job is a jail term. They live in mortal fear of *messing up, getting in trouble with the boss, getting transferred, passed over, laid-off or terminated*. Such fears suck the energy and joy out of them. It can manifest itself by anxiety, anger, bitterness, gossip and / or overall negativity.
  - Finally, there are the “happy” Dwarves. They’re not addicted to their jobs, but to *being happy in their job*. They are work-minimalists, the “its-not-my-job-its-hers” type and the “trading-up-this-job-for-that-one” crowd, in search of greener pastures.
- ii. There are other types of Dwarves too, and various attitudes about the “mines” they their lives in. What unites “Catholic Dwarves”—regardless of their disposition about their work is that one way or another, is that among other things, their faith is often sacrificed or marginalized compared with the amount of time, thought and energy that they give to their work.
- c. **Evangelizing Dwarves 2.0:**
- i. First—and to begin with, equip yourself on the Church’s “theology of work:”
- *Matt. 22:22: “And Jesus said unto them, Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.”*
  - Vatican II: “Just as human activity proceeds from man, so it is *ordered towards man. For when a man works he not only alters things and society, he develops himself as well. He learns much, he cultivates his resources, he goes outside of himself and beyond himself.* Rightly understood, this kind of growth is of greater value than any external riches... in accord with the Divine plan and will, [work] should *harmonize* with the genuine good of the human race, and allow people as individuals and as members of society to *pursue their total vocation and fulfil it*” (*Gaudium et spes*, §35)<sup>7</sup>
  - Saint Pope John Paul II: “The *primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject ... However true it may be that man is destined for work and called to it, in the first place work is ‘for man’ and not man ‘for work’ ... in the final analysis it is always man who is the purpose of the work ...*” Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, § 6).<sup>8</sup>
  - Saint Pope John Paul II: “If one wishes to define the meaning of work, it is this. *Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes “more a human being”* (Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, § 9).
- ii. Second—see to be a witness for the Gospel in *how* you conduct yourself in your work. Focus on the virtues of integrity, honesty and patience. Avoid gossip.

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<sup>7</sup> Available here: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>8</sup> Available here: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_14091981\\_laborem-exercens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html).

- Seek to build community with co-workers. Promote, support or advocate for “family-friendly” policies wherever possible.
- iii. Third—where possible, engage others on the “meaning” of *their* work. Discover their attitude about work, and what meaning it opens up in their lives. *Do they view work as their meaning—or is meaning and fulfillment derived from their work?* Seek what lies under the surface, what dormant passions are buried under their mounds of work. Ask what they like to do with free time. *What do look forward to when they are not working, e.g., on weekends, or ultimately, when they retire? What would they do with their time if they didn’t have to work or had more free time?* Join them in a common passion (cooking, racquetball). Allow them to see your *fulfillment rooted in Jesus Christ*, not in your paycheck, position / title.
  - iv. Fourth—be attentive to *younger adults* and their views on work. It is often more difficult to affect the disposition of a 50-something who has spent decades building an “earthly kingdom” view of work. (Don’t give up on them: love them, witness to them and pray for them!) Yet, people in their 20’s and 30’s may be less *deterministic* in their “philosophy of work.” Seek to impart new perspectives about worship / rest / play.
    - *Is the young guy in your office a church-goer?*
    - *Has he adopted addictive / toxic ideas about work from professors? Parents?*
    - *What are their passions?*
  - v. Fifth—be available. Listen to Catholic Dwarves as they “talk shop.” This can be an excellent opportunity to understand them better, learn about their lives, and long-term goals. Offer to pray for their concerns about work.
  - vi. Sixth—help younger Dwarves to think about their *vocation*. Engage them about the purpose and meaning derived through their work. All work is an opportunity to *serve*, support, and *do good* for the benefit of others.
  - vii. Seventh and finally—help Dwarves to think about purpose and meaning aside from their work. Invite them to “step out of the mine.” Invite co-workers to family celebrations, to share a meal together, etc. Our work may put us in proximity with people *we might otherwise never get to know*. *Why not really get to know some of them—as God guides—and to share the love of Jesus with them?*

### 3. ORCS

- a. **Middle Earth Context:**
  - i. Reprehensible race in Middle Earth that inflict every sort of wickedness upon the good. “They hated all things of beauty and loved to kill and destroy.”<sup>9</sup>
  - ii. The Orcs were created by Melkor, the corrupted Ainur (i.e., angelic spirit) at the beginning of the First Age (*The Silmarillion*).
  - iii. Orcs were “bred” by Melkor by Elves that he had captured. As such, the Orcs sort of represent “twisted” elves. Their swarthy appearance, ill-character, crude

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<sup>9</sup> Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle Earth*, 388.

talk and love of the dark is a reversal of the Elves, who are pristine in appearance, of strong character, poetical in language and bathed in light.

- iv. In the context of Middle Earth, Orcs are dark characters and evil in themselves. The real danger, however, is that they are motivated by greater evils still \*i.e., Sauron and Sauron).
- v. They do not treat others (or themselves) with dignity and respect, but with ugliness, contempt and are motivated out of deeply selfish desires. They are violent and capable of all sorts of bad behavior.

b. **Real World Context:**

- i. There are many reasons that people have Orc-like patterns of living today. The following is anything but a complete list. Nevertheless, it is helpful, as well as necessary, for people of faith to better understand something of why people are the way they are.
- ii. Some Orcs became the way they are because they themselves were abused, ignored, or taught to disrespect themselves and others. Often, this “formation” happens at a young age, for example, as children. This *by no means* excuses their rotten behavior as adults (e.g., criminals, abusers, racists)—not in the least. Yet, it can help us appreciate why they in turn abuse or disrespect others, whether with words or actions.
- iii. Other Orcs have “lost their way.” Some of their own personal choices have led them to a place of brokenness, depression, desperation and cynicism. Sadly, it is a downward spiral that gets worse, not better—unless they are willing to admit that they have a problem and in humility, seek help.
- iv. Still others have bad influences around them—be it troublesome youth, gangs, a friend or family member who is an addict, into the occult, etc. Some Orcs become the way they are because they have become disenfranchised with “the system.” They have been hurt by and / or alienated by the “institutions” that others form a (relatively) healthy relationship with, such as: their network of family and friends; the Church / a local church community, school / teachers, law enforcement, the government and / or political parties.
- v. Finally, many Orcs end up that way by forsaking “the virtues” and virtuous choices. They are lulled into secular and bankrupt philosophies that are hedonistic, narcissistic, or downright hateful and distrusting of others. Whether it is shoplifting, “hooking up” with girls in clubs, taking part in violent “protests,” bullying others in school, offending or attacking others because they look, believe or act different than they do, such persons can be truly toxic to be around.

c. **Evangelizing Orcs 2.0???:**

- i. At first glance, based upon the above description, one might be tempted to want to simply move on to the last categories, of Wizards and Elves. This is understandable—and sometimes, the best thing to do is to essentially move away and not towards such persons.

- ii. Yet, *Jesus did not write off persons—even the most difficult persons—neither may we.* As He observed, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, *but the sick*” (Luke 5:31). Later in the Gospel, he declared that “the Son of Man came *to seek and to save the lost*” (Luke 19:10).
- iii. Still, a few clarifications and cautions are necessary:
- TEAMWORK / COLLABORATION. “Evangelizing orcs” can be messy (and in some circumstances, dangerous). The Hobbits were able to overcome them—but usually through collaboration and team work. Don’t go it alone. *Does your parish have an outreach that you can become involved with?*
  - WISE BOUNDARIES. Definitely *do* step out of your comfort zone, but do so prudently. The New Evangelization requires to get your “shoes dirty” (Pope Francis)—but not *our hearts*. Orcs do not often have good boundaries. We must. If we are so close to a messy situation that the “slime” of the Orcs is dripping on us, affecting our closeness to Christ, or tempting us to think or behave as them—then we may be *too close* and in need to stepping back and re-approaching at another time in a healthy way.
  - VIRTUE EVANGELIZATION. One of the things we can most certainly do around Orcs—unhesitatingly—is to be committed leading a consistently *virtuous life*. Our choices, convictions and principles often speak more loudly than many words. We should, however, not do so in a “preachy” way, or in way than “telescopes” how holy we are (or how lost they are). Attributed to St. Francis: “Preach the Gospel; use words as necessary.”
  - FERVENT PRAYER. Finally, we should *never give up* on people. Moses murdered a man, and David was an adulterer. Peter denied Jesus three times. Yet, all of them did experience *conversion*, in the Lord’s own time and way. St. Monica prayed fervently for her son, and Augustine was, by all accounts, a wretched sinner and might have appeared to other Christians as a “lost cause.”
  - A PRAYER TO ST. MONICA, FOR LOST SOULS. *O saintly mother of Augustine the sinner, Jesus mercifully regarded your tears. The conversion of your son to a genuinely holy life was the fruit of your prayer. From the heights of heaven, intercede for the lost—for all those who appear to be far off from God. In a special way, keep close to your heart all parents who sorrow over the straying souls of sons and daughters. Pray for us as well, that, by your tireless example, we too may not cease to intercede for their salvation and well-being in this life in the next, and that God’s mercy will touch their hearts and awaken them, and that they will respond and enter into His joy. Amen*

#### 4. EVANGELIZING WIZARDS

##### a. Middle Earth Context:

- i. In *The Silmarillion*, five (possibly more?) beings are sent to Middle Earth by the Valar (above), “to assist in their struggles against Sauron.”<sup>10</sup>
- ii. Though commonly called “Wizards,” their formal name is the “Istari.” Each had his own “color” and rank in the hierarchy of the Istari. Aside from Galdalf the Grey, the other four Istari are: Saurman the White (the eldest) and Radagast the Brown. The other two are unnamed “Blue Wizards.”<sup>11</sup>
- iii. After the defeat of Sauron in the Third Age, Gandalf’s work was finished and he passed into the West with the Keepers of the Rings.<sup>12</sup>
- iv. The Istari are either Valar or Valar-like. Though they bore the image of older men, they are decidedly not men. They are sort of like incarnate angels. They have great powers of mind—and unlike angels—of body. They are capable of “magic” and can perform incantations, but most often veil and limit such powers. It is really when Istari “go to the dark side” that their magical powers are more visible (e.g., Saurman).
- v. Gandalf often conceals his deeper powers, which seem to be concentrated / especially operable through his staff, a kind of priestly instrument. Gandalf is extremely powerful—as in his “fatal” defeat of the Balrog in the Mines of Moria. His return as Gandalf the White is often described as a “resurrection.” While analogous to Jesus’ Resurrection *in some sense*, it should be remembered that Tolkien did not traffic in “allegory” did not like it, and an allegorical meaning should not be taken.

##### b. Real World Context:

- i. Who are the Wizards of the real world? Like the Istari of Middle Earth, we may sometimes have occasion to encounter people who simply astonish us.
- ii. As in Middle Earth, in our own world, Wizards are often enigmagtic, moving to the beat of their own drum. They are often highly intelligent and / or in possession of personality traits that command attention and respect.
- iii. Some Wizards live in “castles in far off lands” and our contact with them may be sporadic, intermittent or even a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence (sports figures, well-known speakers / business leaders, authors, and other “rock stars”).
- iv. Their giftedness may be accompanied by some level of success (e.g., the CEO, erudite politico or accomplished anesthesiologist). Though not always—some creatives are truly Wizards and “starving artists” (e.g., local painters, the poet at the coffee shop; the classical piano instructor at the community college).

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<sup>10</sup> Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle Earth*, 147, 273-74.

<sup>11</sup> Not much is known about the so-called Blue Wizards. *The Silmarillion* indicates they dwelt in the east. In a letter, Tolkien suggests that the Blue Wizards were the mentors of the Magi. There is also debate as to whether the Istari are of the Maiar or a separate race altogether (see Foster).

<sup>12</sup> Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle Earth*, 147, 274.

- v. Though their talents are unmistakable, and though some are “public” persons, many times Wizards guard their privacy and are in reality much more introverted than people imagine.
  - vi. Not all Wizards are “spiritual gurus”—in fact, some are agnostic / atheistic or secular humanists. Some are Catholic or of other religious backgrounds. Still others may self-described as “none’s,” that is, people with no known religious background or affiliation.
- c. **Evangelizing Wizards 2.0:**
- i. One of the biggest challenges in evangelizing Wizards is their “elusiveness.” Their various “Wizardsly-traits” can intimidate us: a long list of credentials and / or accomplishments; fame; wealth; a Type-A or over-the-top personality.
  - ii. Here, we would do well to remember the mindset of St. Paul, who sought to meet everyone on their own terms—and so begin to engage them as fellow human beings with needs like anyone else.
  - iii. Very evident in St. Paul’s letters is his desire to introduce people to Christ. He is not intimidated by position, achievement or power, but sees the deeper human needs that lie beneath the surface of all of us (*Rom. 3:23*).
  - iv. Although there is no single “strategy” for evangelizing Wizards, a few things may be kept in mind:
    - One of the qualities Wizards (like most everyone else) find appealing is people who don’t “kiss up” to them. Recently, actor Patrick Dempsey (*Grey’s Anatomy*) had car trouble while in Lincoln, Nebraska. Immediately, several local guys stopped to help him. They helped him get his car towed and while it was being repaired, bought him breakfast at the local diner. What astonished him was their genuineness and their character:
    - “‘And these guys had *no idea* who I was which, honestly, *just made my day*. I’m telling you, these people in Lincoln are the real deal. If I ever retire, I’m moving there!’ Dempsey said with a laugh . . . Dempsey added later, “You have to understand, this is something that would have never happened in L.A.! So yeah. . . that’s my story about Lincoln, Nebraska. It’s nice to know that there are still places like this in America.”<sup>13</sup>
    - Another suggestion for evangelizing Wizards is by simply *being truly excellent* at what we do. Those that work in hospitality / service industries take note! Being efficient, courteous, and attentive to their unique needs may or may not gain us a hearing, but may open the possibility.
    - When all else fails, a good sense of humor is always appealing. Once, at a high-profile dinner party, Flannery O’Connor found herself the

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<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.wnpe6.com/lincoln-nebraska/46h/>.

solitary Catholic in a sea of Manhattan socialites. One bemusedly broke the silence and said, politely but somewhat condescendingly, “Flannery, your Eucharist is very beautiful.” O’Connor responded with her usual wit, saying, “It is. But if its not the Son of God then the hell with it.”

## 5. EVANGELIZING ELVES

### a. Middle Earth Context:

- i. The “firstborn” race of Ilúvatar, the Elves are the “eldest and noblest of the speaking races of Middle Earth.”<sup>14</sup> One thinks especially of Legolas as well as Galadriel and Elrond in *The Lord of the Rings*.
- ii. Above all, the Elves love beauty and all things beautiful, “especially the wonders of nature, above all the waters of Ulmo and the stars of Elberet that shown upon them at their awakening.”<sup>15</sup>
- iii. Apparently, Elves have no need of sleep, but simply rest their minds in daydreams and / or by contemplating beauty.

### b. Real World Context:

- i. What do ‘real world’ Elves look like? In a phrase, they are people with whom a good foundation in philosophy is especially helpful.
- ii. Sometimes, seminarians will wonder why they need to study philosophy today—instead of diving directly into theology. My former Rector had a great response. He would say that when he was a young priest, most of the questions that people asked of him were indeed theological / biblical in nature: “*How can I understand transubstantiation?*” “*Can you explain the immaculate Conception to me?*” “*What is the difference between the Old and New Testament?*” (or) “*... between our Bible and Protestant Bibles?*” “*In which of the Gospels is Jesus \_\_\_\_\_?*” And so on.
- iii. By contrast, my Rector would caution them that today’s priest is much more likely to be asked questions of a philosophical nature. The sorts of questions people ask today are more like: “*How can we know if God exists?*” “*Aren’t all religions basically the same?*” “*Why would a good God allow the Holocaust / 911?*”
- iv. Some Elves are Catholic—and yet stuck in philosophical questions as these.
- v. Other Elves are truly “none’s”—those with no religious affiliation or any known religious upbringing / heritage.
- vi. Still other Elves are *spiritual* but in a manner that is intentionally disassociated with formal religion. They may say things like: “*I’m spiritual but not religious,*” “*I do not need dogma to experience God,*” or “*I am not interested in organized religion—but I am a very spiritual person in many ways.*”

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<sup>14</sup> Foster, *The Complete Guide to Middle Earth*, 147.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

c. **Evangelizing Elves 2.0:**

- i. First, take heart! You need not become a philosopher to evangelize our culture.
- ii. It is true that today, many people have questions that are “more philosophical than theological.” That is not to say that they themselves are philosophers, or that they have studied much philosophy. Often times, their point of view is muddled, a fragmentary blend of this and that worldview or something they heard on Bill Maher or in a movie.
- iii. Even so, the roots of their questions are often *existential* in nature:
  - *Where did we come from?*
  - *Why are we here? How do we find meaning? How should we live?*
  - *Is there a purpose or a goal in life? Do religions offer answers?*
  - *What happens—if anything at all—when we die?*
- iv. In other words, what this means is that the most basic questions of “worldview” and “meaning” are lacking. Here, we need to be able to help them with questions of *human origin, human morality and human destiny*. As none’s or “spiritual but not religious” the Elves need help in getting a basic orientation to *anthropology*. The good news is that the Catholic faith has a tremendous wealth of resources in this regard (Christian anthropology).
- v. We can draw on Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition—and should! But we need a language that they can access, Avoid theological mumbo-jumbo. Use illustrations and stories. Ask if they understand—seek clarity and connection.
- vi. As much as we love Scripture and Tradition, this is *Supernatural (i.e. Divine) Revelation*. We may need to start with *Natural Revelation / Natural Law*. With *logic, with reason*.
- vii. Certainly, knowing St. Thomas is great, if you can access him. For many of us, a good place to begin is with someone like Dr. Peter Kreeft. He is solidly orthodox, and addresses a number of philosophically-oriented topics in an array of books.
- viii. The works of C.S. Lewis are also excellent, especially *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*.
- ix. Contemporary theologian Ed Sri has a recent book called *Who Am I to Judge* that looks at moral relativism—with evangelization in mind.
- x. Viewing Bishop Barron’s *Catholicism: The New Evangelization* series would be worthwhile.

## CONCLUSION:

- This reflection is not intended to place people into “categories.” Above all, God made us as human beings with a unique set of DNA, with our own backstory, family, experiences, likes and dislikes, and spiritual history. It would be a mistake to use this talk in a *prescriptive* way, that is, to “label” people or to pigeon-hole them—or to use this as a “grid” for knowing what to say to this or that person.
- This reflection is intended to be *descriptive* of the reality that we will meet and talk with a wide array of people. We need to listen with *charity* and speak with clarity. And indeed, we need to “be ready” to give an answer for the hope of Jesus Christ that lies within us (*1 Pet. 3:15*).
- Bishop Robert Barron has said on more than one occasion that in the age of the New Evangelization, we should *lead with beauty*. Beauty, he adds, is the “arrowhead” of the New Evangelization.
- Indeed, the Truth is beautiful. The Trinity is beautiful! Jesus is beauty Incarnate! The Church—for all the ills people ascribe to it—is when properly understood, deeply and profoundly beautiful. Life, in all of its mystery and goodness, is beautiful. *Beauty is beautiful-and attractive*.
- May we ourselves be “re-infected” with the truth, goodness and beauty of our Catholic faith—of Sacred Scripture, the lives of the Saints, the Church’s teachings on marriage and sexuality—all of it.
- J.R.R. Tolkien understood this, and has a remarkable quote about the beauty of the Holy Eucharist:
  - "Out of the darkness of my life, so much frustrated, I put before you the one great thing to love on earth: the Blessed Sacrament ... *There you will find romance, glory, honour, fidelity, and the true way of all your loves upon earth ... which every man's heart desires.*"<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *Letter 142*.