

Seeing With the Eye of Sauron: Amazon's "Rings of Power"

Joseph Pearce, The Imaginative Conservative, September 9, 2022

The whole point of "The Lord of the Rings" is that true heroism is inseparable from true humility, and that true humility is inseparable from true love. The spirit of Amazon's "Rings of Power" is the very reverse of this. Heroism is inseparable from pride, and pride is inseparable from self-empowerment.



What would happen if the one-store-to-rule-them-all-and-in-the-darkness-bind-them got its hands on the one-ring-to-rule-them-all-and-in-the-darkness-bind-them? In other words, what would happen if Amazon got its hands on the Ring of Power? It might once have been merely a scary thought but now it's a sickening reality.

Having bought the rights to *The Lord of the Rings*, Amazon premiered its "prequel" to Tolkien's epic earlier this month. It is seemingly as bad as expected. I say "seemingly" because I personally have no plans to sully myself with its presence in my mind. I have better things to do with my time than allow myself to be slimed.

I have friends, however, who braved the first episode. This is one friend's immediate impression of the underlying agenda:

This was very subtle and disguised with distractions, but eventually I realized that they were presenting their idealized woke world — as it would be if the woke ascendancy succeeded in completely swapping the roles of men and women in society, as they seem to want to do. They have been trying to feminize men and empower women, and that is the world we see here. All the men are rather androgynous in their spoken manner, weak, and cowardly, while Galadriel displays all the machismo. When the party she leads is attacked by a troll, the men run, leaving Galadriel to slay it herself with swordplay worthy of a Japanese steak house.

The series also practices what its producers would call "positive" or "affirmative" racial discrimination. The roles of the strong and the wise are disproportionately played by non-white actors.

This is all to be expected but is only a sideshow which should not distract us from the real darkness at the heart of this distortion and desecration of the spirit of Tolkien's work. The whole point of *The Lord of the Rings* is that true heroism is inseparable from true humility, and that true humility is inseparable from true love. The spirit of Amazon's *Rings of Power* is the very reverse of this. Heroism is inseparable from pride, and pride is inseparable from self-empowerment.

Let's remember, because it is perilous to forget, that Tolkien described *The Lord of the Rings* as "a fundamentally religious and Catholic work". The spirit of the work is, therefore, rooted in a Christian understanding of love, or *caritas*, which is the very opposite of the secular understanding of what is also called "love". At the heart of Christian love is the paradoxical truth that the "first shall be last". To love is to lay down our lives self-sacrificially for the beloved. This true love is truly heroic and is only possible if we possess the humility necessary to put ourselves second or last. Christian love is, therefore, a rational choice.

The secular understanding of love is entirely different. It is, in fact, the demonically diametrical opposite of true love. For the worldly, love is a feeling, an emotion, an urge. It is, therefore, irrational. If I can find someone who has similar feelings towards me as I have towards them, we can satisfy and gratify each other's feelings and emotions. It feels good. If it no longer feels good, we don't "love" that person any longer and begin to look for someone else to gratify and satisfy our emotional needs and urges. This sort of "love" is essentially self-centered. It is rooted in pride. It does not lay down its life for the beloved, it lays down the life of the beloved for itself. It is this pride which leads to the demands for "self-empowerment". This is the sort of "empowerment" which craves the power that the Ring has to offer.

Tolkien stated that *The Lord of the Rings* is an allegory of power, especially power usurped for domination. Those who seek the self-empowerment that the Ring offers always end up dominating others. The more self-empowerment we are able to attain the more we use such power to serve our own selfish desires at the expense of those who are weaker than us.

But there is also another side to the power of the Ring. Its power corrupts the one who seeks self-empowerment by using it. Self-empowerment is the gollumization of the self until the self becomes a slave to the pride it has chosen. The possessor becomes the possessed.

This is the real reason why Amazon's *Rings of Power* is the very negation of the true love and humility which animates *The Lord of the Rings*. Those who advocate Pride and self-empowerment are gollumizing themselves and are seeking to gollumize others. *The Rings of Power* is the gollumizing of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Let's finish with a lesson from *The Lord of the Rings* itself which will serve as a metaphor for what the Amazon-Mordor alliance has done with the goodness, truth and beauty of Tolkien's work.

At one of the darkest moments in the story, Frodo and Sam arrive at the Cross-Roads *en route* to Mordor. By the light of the setting sun they see the statue of an ancient king, “a huge sitting figure, still and solemn as the great stone kings of Argonath”. To their horror, they see that the violent and vandalizing hands of orcs had maimed it and defaced it, defiling it with foul graffiti, “idle scrawls mixed with the foul symbols that the maggot-folk of Mordor used”. The ancient statue had been decapitated, “and in its place was set in mockery a round rough-hewn stone, rudely painted by savage hands in the likeness of a grinning face with one large red eye in the midst of its forehead”.

The symbolism of this scene is both potent and palpable. The statue, sculpted lovingly by an ancient artist into the likeness of the king, can be likened to the beauty and majesty of Tolkien’s work. The statue is a living and edifying symbol of civilization, much as *The Lord of the Rings* is a symbol of civilization.

By contrast, the statue’s defilement by the forces of darkness is a reflection of the inversion and perversion of the spirit of the goodness, truth and beauty that the statue represents. The decapitation of the king and its replacement by an ugly and leering rough-hewn stone, daubed with paint and crowned with the symbol of Sauron, signifies the triumph of the Usurper over the Creator, the turning of the order of the cosmos on its head.

And yet, in the midst of this apparent triumph of darkness over light, the light itself dispels the darkness:

Suddenly, caught by the level beams [of the setting sun], Frodo saw the old king’s head: it was lying rolled away by the roadside. “Look, Sam!” he cried, startled into speech. “Look! The king has got a crown again!”

The eyes were hollow and the carved beard was broken, but about the high stern forehead there was a coronal of silver and gold. A trailing plant with flowers like small white stars had bound itself across the brows as if in reverence for the fallen king, and in the crevices of his stony hair yellow stonecrop gleamed.

“They cannot conquer for ever!” said Frodo. And then suddenly the brief glimpse was gone. The Sun dipped and vanished, and as if at the shuttering of a lamp, black night fell.

In these few lines, as if by a miracle of grace, the hobbits have been shown a microcosmic glimpse of the order of the cosmos. As on several other occasions in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, the light of the Sun (significantly capitalized) is the finger of Providence, i.e. the Presence of the Creator Himself. By His light, the power of darkness is removed so that the hobbits can be encouraged by a vision of the restoration of the true hierarchy. Thus the Creator reveals his Creation, in the form of the stonecrop and the trailing plant, crowning the king and the work of art with silver and gold flowers, restoring the glory of civilization with the promise of resurrection. It is God

blessing Art; it is Creation crowning Sub-Creation; it is Life crowning the Good, the True and the Beautiful!

Although the “brief glimpse” soon vanishes, it was, as Frodo clearly understands, the “sudden and miraculous grace” of which Tolkien writes in his essay “On Fairy-Stories”, a joyous epiphany which “denies ... universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world”. It shows, as Sam would sing in another dark moment soon afterwards, that “above all shadows rides the Sun”, which is why we can be sure, as Frodo proclaims, that the powers of darkness cannot conquer forever.

The Amazon-Mordor alliance has done its best to deface the beauty of *The Lord of the Rings*. Its rationally loving Christian heart has been replaced with a rough-hewn heart of stone. It has been decapitated by the removal of the reason which animates it and the rational love which is the triumph of reason itself. It has been daubed with the pride of Sauron. Its goodness, truth and beauty have been removed and all that is left is the ugliness of reality seen with the eye of Sauron.

Lovers of Tolkien’s masterpiece should respond to such an act of desecration in the way that all true hobbits should respond. We should look up to the heavens, to the light beyond all darkness. “Above all shadows rides the sun,” says Sam. And, as Frodo proclaims: “They cannot conquer forever!”