

## **PAGAN SAINTS IN MIDDLE-EARTH**

Review by Ryder W Miller

Pagan Saints in Middle-earth by Claudio A Testi, Foreword by Verlyn Flieger & Afterword by Tom Shippey (Cormarë Series 38); Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree Publishers, 2018. Paper, \$24.30 from Amazon.com.

Professor Claudio Antonio Testi, President of the Philosophical Institute of Thomistic Studies and with other academic appointments, attempts to make the peace between those who consider Middle-earth pagan and those who view it as Christian. Some have pointed out that there are no churches (despite some cults for Morgoth in "The Fall of Númenor") or Christ in Middle-earth. Others, including Tolkien, have pointed out that the work is inherently Christian, even if it does not reference religious figures from our known world. Some of the characters in Middle-earth share some of the attributes of Biblical heroes.

It is interesting to see here how Testi reconciles Tolkien's interest in finding a pre-Christian mythology for England and his expression of being a devout Roman Catholic. This book is based on papers and research Testi has done on this subject, but it is highly referenced sharing the thoughts of many others on this subject. He also pays tribute to those who have explored this question before him. Apparently there are different camps with one arguing that Tolkien's work is Christian, while the other is of the opinion that it is Pagan. He asserts that there is a mediation which acknowledges both sides of the argument. Losing the passion of argument the points being made seem less emotional.

Some though might learn from reading the book, which provides some background on both camps, that Catholicism, which has existed for millennia, has incorporated historical groups and beliefs of the past. Testi argues that the Church has incorporated elements of paganism as well as northern European mythology (The Norse...). The King Arthur mythos though is not included in Tolkien's desire to unearth this mythology because it already included elements and plot lines concerning the English Church. The Faërie, Tolkien also argued, is supposed to have its own rules and logic which distinguishes itself from ours.

Tolkien's magnificent literary creation has been compared to a mixed soup. Just like in the Christian doctrine, there is a three part demarcation in Middle-earth, God (Eru), Angels (Valar and Maia), and People (Men, Elves...) So in some ways there is monotheism, but the Valar do seem like mythological gods in The Silmarillion, which can be interpreted from the Western Society sense of what some of the punishments are for distancing oneself from the creator or trying to be creators themselves. There is also much nature reverence in Tolkien's works. One should also acknowledge in this subject matter that many elements of Middle-earth might derive from the writings and stories of the scriptures.

Pagan Saints in Middle-earth will provide a context to understand this debate and a resolution. Famous Tolkien experts like Verlyn Flieger and Tom Shippey were impressed with the strength and results of Testi's argument and presentation. The going might be a bit tough for non academics. One might need to look up some words here which in themselves have been the sources of study and debate. Many annotations are available for those who want to study this or related subjects further. There is much here for those who want to understand JRR Tolkien who is less enigmatic because of this treatise.