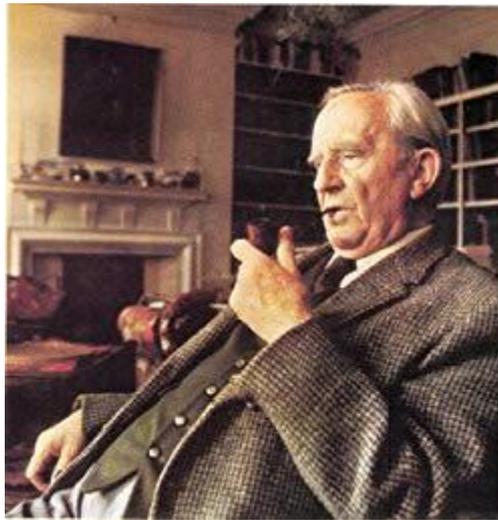


Frodo Baggins: Representative of the Human Aspects of Jesus Christ in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

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J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973)

Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.in/J.-R.-R.-Tolkien/e/B000ARC6KA>

Abstract

The study focuses on Christological symbolism in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. It investigated which figure in the story exemplify as Christ. In Tolkien's life, the impact religion had on him. Tolkien was a devout Catholic and his religious beliefs impacted several of his key relationships. The study emphasizes the importance of religion in both his upbringing and his overall perception, representing how his beliefs have permeated his fantasy writing. His Secondary world led him to unconsciously create a story that strongly reflects Catholic Christian themes. The study explores the Catholic doctrine. Here, Frodo Baggins, Gandalf, Aragon, and Sam are as Christ figures in *The Lord of the Rings*. Through these figures, the study emphasis in Catholicism seems to be asserting the true humanity of Jesus in the character of Frodo Baggins. Frodo would be representative of the fully human aspect of Jesus. This paper concludes with a detailed comparison of Christ with Frodo. The study shows how the character is Christ-like not only in their actions but also in their character traits and relationship to other characters in the story.

Keywords: J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* Symbolism, Religion, Catholic, Humanity, Christ, and Relationship.

Frodo is the protagonist in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. He shares a few important Christ-like attributes with Gandalf, namely his merciful and self-sacrificial nature. While for Gandalf these qualities might culminate in a singular action such as sacrificing himself on the Bridge of Khazadum, Frodo must keep these virtues in constant practice. Frodo's character is wrapped in an air of mystery. He was raised by Bilbo, the only hobbit in Hobbiton to ever leave the Shire when his parents died at a young age. He calls Bilbo an uncle although the two are really cousins. When Bilbo leaves the Shire for the second and final time, he bequeaths his belongings to Frodo along with his magic ring. Along with Bag End, Frodo seems to have inherited Bilbo's reputation for strangeness, taking counsel with bizarre folk like the wizard Gandalf.

Christ was born into a humble family and heroes as a carpenter's son. This humility contributes to his humanness. He does not come into the world as a great king but as a lowly carpenter so that he might identify with every man's sufferings. The image of the suffering crucified redeemer presented by Matthias Neuman. Christ participated in a fully human form so that he might share in our pain and struggles. Tolkien offers us a parallel image of the character of Frodo. Hobbits are simple creatures, known not to travel beyond their lands or to be involved in the affairs of others outside of their race. But Frodo takes on the burden of the Ring not just for the sake of his own people but also for the whole of Middle Earth. At the Council of Elrond, Boromir questions, "And how has it passed down the years, until it is brought hither by so strange a messenger?" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 262). Frodo radiates as the unexpected rescuer, the unforeseen hero. Frodo's strange ability is to resist the power of the Ring and it is his unique courage for a hobbit. Similar to the lowly carpenter's son, there is much more to Frodo than meets the eye.

Frodo's role in Middle Earth is as the chosen one and he is fated for self-sacrifice. After Jesus' death, his followers were quick to attribute many of the old Messianic prophecies to him, claiming his life as a fulfillment of prophecy. Boromir shares a prophetic dream with the Council of Elrond in the Fellowship of the Ring: "Seek the Sword that was broken: /In Imladris it dwells... And the Halfling Forth shall stand" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 259). This is a prediction of Frodo stepping up to accept the burden of the Ring. Just like Christ, Frodo's life is a fulfillment of prophecy. Beyond his dreams and divinations are carrying the One Ring to Mordor. Gandalf alludes to this at the very beginning of the story, claiming, "I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it." (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 65)

Gandalf speaks of a divine plan for Frodo's life. Elrond will echo these sentiments further into the story: "I think that this task is appointed for you, Frodo; and that if you do not find a way, no one will" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 284). The life of Christ appears fated for self-sacrifice and he tells his disciples of this purpose, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45) Christ would forfeit his human life by dying on the cross. Frodo surrenders his life to carry the One Ring into Mordor.

Christ showed moments of reluctance in accepting his fate demonstrated through his prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. Frodo exhibits similar hesitance when agreeing to carry the Ring both to Rivendell and to Mordor. He says, "I wish I had never seen the Ring! Why did it come to me? Why was I chosen?" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 70). He tries to get Gandalf to take the Ring, trusting Gandalf's wisdom and strength. But when Gandalf refuses, Frodo accepts the perilous task at hand. Frodo is reluctant to volunteer himself at the Council of Elrond. When the time comes, "An overwhelming longing to rest and remain at peace by Bilbo's side in Rivendell filled all his heart. At

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last with an effort he spoke....” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 284). Just before accepting the burden, Frodo is wishing that he could remain safely in Rivendell and avoid any more adventures. The study argues that both Christ’s and Frodo’s hesitancy to undertake their dangerous tasks highlights their humanity.

Frodo’s physical works parallel the weight of the cross on Christ, who carries the cross to his crucifixion place. As in *The Two Towers* describes, In fact with every step towards the gates of Mordor Frodo felt the Ring on its chain about his neck grow more burdensome. He was now beginning to feel it as an actual weight dragging him earth wards. Sam and Frodo get nearer to Mordor, the Ring begins to drag Frodo downward, “Frodo’s head was bowed; his burden was dragging him down again” (Tolkien, *Towers* 688). As a representative of the human aspect of Christ, Frodo must struggle physically with his cargo in order for us to relate. Christ underwent bodily sufferings so he could identify with human suffering and pain; Frodo’s troubles are equally necessary.

The Christ-like qualities of Frodo possess are his leadership abilities and his merciful, forgiving nature. When the hobbits take a detour through the Old Forest in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Frodo leads his companions with confidence. Later, in his interactions with Gollum, Sam sees Frodo grow into the image of a lord: “a tall stern shadow, a mighty lord who hid his brightness in grey cloud” (Tolkien, *Towers* 604). Sam, Frodo, and Gollum find themselves in the company of the men of the West, Frodo requests to be blind folded first so that Gollum can see that it is safe. Frodo would not expect Gollum to act in a trusting manner. Similarly, Jesus calls others to give up their belongings and seek the kingdom of God. Christ leads by example by traveling with his disciples, without material goods and depending on the help to the community. He teaches his disciples to be accepting of even the lowliest members of society. As a model, Jesus takes meals with the tax collectors and prostitutes, much to the Pharisees’ corn.

Christ’s interactions with these outcastes reveal his merciful nature. He says, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). For instance, in John 8, the scribes and Pharisees bring an adulterous woman before Jesus and question him about how she should be punished. Jesus responds, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). Christ teaches mercy to those whom society would punish and reject. Frodo acts in a similar manner towards Gollum because of Gandalf’s wisdom. Frodo’s original belief that Gollum deserves death for his treachery and crimes, he chooses to spare Gollum when they encounter and trap him on their journey. Frodo prevents the men of the West from executing Gollum for entering the forbidden pool. His pity and mercy saves Gollum’s life on many occasions and encourages Gollum to act as a loyal guide. Frodo is also merciful towards Saruman and Grima Wormtongue at the end of *The Return of the King*. In spite of the evil and fighting they have caused in the Shire, he tries to pardon their actions. He prevents the hobbits from executing Saruman and gives Grima the opportunity to turn away from Saruman’s service.

Frodo’s individual storyline contains several events that mimic the life of Christ. He faces temptation, betrayal, physical torment and suffering, imprisonment, and torture. Christ faces temptation in the wilderness in Matthew 4 when Satan appears and offers him food, power, and glory. Christ successfully resists all of these temptations and leaves the wilderness. Frodo’s struggle stems from the temptation to wear the Ring and use its power. His tests come throughout his journey to Mordor, starting as soon as he leaves the Shire for Rivendell. When the first black rider appears in the story, the hobbits are extremely frightened and hide. In his fear, “Frodo hardly dared to breathe, and yet the desire to get it out of his pocket became so strong that he began slowly to move his hand”

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(Tolkien, *Fellowship* 84). He seems tempted to use the Ring to protect himself, but later he battles with the urge to take the Ring for its power. The Ring begins to possess him but Frodo is able to resist it all the way to Mount Doom. As are presentative of the human aspect of Christ, Frodo constantly fights the temptation of the Ring like humanity must combat the temptations of the flesh. As the image of the suffering crucified saviour, Frodo must undergo several physical sufferings like Christ faces.

Christ must face his pain and torments in order to understand the toils of humanity. Before his crucifixion and imprisonment, Frodo is stabbed by ring wraiths. He dragged into a lake by a dark creature and speared by a troll. His encounter with the ringwraiths is particularly significant because it leaves a permanent scar on Frodo's body. In the gospel of John, Jesus reveals the permanent scars on his hands and side to his disciples. He says to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side" (John 20:28). The scars are reminder of the suffering Christ underwent for mankind. Frodo's shoulder scar bothers him on the anniversary of his stabbing on Weather top. He tells Sam two years after the event, "I am wounded...it will never really heal" (Tolkien, *Return* 1002). The pain of this scar serves as a constant reminder of the journey Frodo undertook to save Middle Earth.

The Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, as Frodo, withdraws from the group at the end of *The Fellowship of the Ring* to meditate over his path. He tells the fellowship, "I know that haste is needed, yet I cannot choose. The burden is heavy. Give me an hour longer, and I will speak" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 412). While he is away from the company, Boromir follows him and speaks to him. Boromir tempts Frodo to take the easier route, to delay to the journey into Mordor by taking the Ring to Gondor where it can be protected. This is a great moment of temptation for Frodo because he is given the option to pass off his burden to others. During this conversation, Frodo sees the negative effect the Ring has on others around him. Boromir attempts to seize the Ring and "His fair and pleasant face was hideously changed; a raging fire was in his eyes" (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 415). Witnessing the Ring's effect gives Frodo the resolve to head straight towards Mordor.

Christ praying in the garden, Frodo has also passed his final test of hesitance and gained a new firmness in his mission. On some level, Boromir's actions could be considered a betrayal of trust. As a member of the fellowship, he is supposed to protect Frodo, aiding the destruction of the Ring at whatever the personal cost. Unfortunately, the power of the Ring lures Boromir to a momentary lapse of judgment, where he places his own desires ahead of what he knows is best for Frodo and the company. Boromir dies shortly after this episode, but not without first repenting and confessing to Aragorn his trespass against Frodo. In regards to Frodo as a Christ figure, Gollum commits the true Judas-like betrayal against him. This event occurs at the end of *The Two Towers*. Gollum has been acting loyally to Frodo as his master up until this point, but the evil of the Ring turns him malicious. He looks for an opportunity to betray Frodo into enemy hands so that he can take the Ring for himself.

Gollum's deceitfulness and its consequences mirror very closely Judas' betrayal and Christ's subsequent imprisonment. When Christ is praying in the garden of Gethsemane before his trials begin, Judas leads "a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders" to find him (Mark 14: 43). In other gospels, these are Roman soldiers. Judas gives the sign to identify Jesus, making his arrest possible. A loyal follower of Christ's steps up to defend him: "But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear" (Mark 14:47). Jesus is arrested and taken to the high priests. His most loyal disciple, Peter, follows at

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a distance (Mark: 14:54). In *The Two Towers*, Gollum leads Sam and Frodo up a mountain pass into a tunnel, claiming it is a secret way into Mordor. Gollum goes into the tunnel first but abandons Sam and Frodo in the dark. Inside the tunnel, a large, malicious, spider-like creature waits to capture the hobbits for food. Gollum's actions have left Frodo defenceless, just like Christ in the garden. He has betrayed Frodo into enemy hands.

Sam and Frodo desperately try to escape the spider's lair, searching as fast as they can to in an exit. Once they are free on the other side of the tunnel, the spider catches up with them and attacks Frodo. The spider stabs Frodo with a venomous stinger that paralyzes him so that he appears dead. Sam rushes to his defence as, "He sprang forward with a yell, and seized his master's sword, in his left hand. Then he charged" (Tolkien, *Towers* 711). This event recalls the image of Christ's follower who cuts off the ear of a slave in his defence. But just as that follower's actions do not prevent Christ's arrest, Sam's aide comes too late. Frodo appears dead, so Sam takes the burden of the Ring upon himself and abandons his master's body. Soon afterward, a company of Orcs appears and spots the body; realizing Frodo is merely paralyzed, they drag him off to the dark tower, completing his Christ-like arrest. Sam recognizes his mistake and takes off after the Orcs: "He could not see anything ahead, for this new passage, twisted and turned constantly; but he thought he was catching the two Orcs up" (Tolkien, *Towers* 724). Frodo's most loyal servant is following after his captors just like Peter follows after Christ.

Christ's capture continues with his trial and torture. He is questioned by Pontius Pilate and sentenced to death. Jesus is stripped, beaten, and mocked before his crucifixion. Once the soldiers crucify him, they take his personal belongings, "they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots." (Matthew 27:35) In an almost identical depiction, when Sam rescues Frodo from the dark tower, he finds him stripped and beaten. Sam can hear the crack of a whip and Frodo's screams before he breaks into the prison chamber (Tolkien, *Towers* 889). The Orcs were fighting over Frodo's garments and personal belongings just as the soldiers' battle over Jesus' clothes. He has endured a Christ-like torture and trial. Frodo's capture and persecution accentuate his role as representative of the human aspect of Christ.

Frodo's final act of self-sacrifice comes when he and Sam finally reach Mount Doom. He is supposed to cast the Ring into the fire but instead claims it for himself. Tolkien explains in his letters Frodo's failure is purely a result of his human frailty. No mortal could have resisted the power of the Ring inside the heart of Mount Doom and so Frodo is overcome by its influence. At this moment, Frodo's task seems to have failed. He submits to the Ring like Christ's human body surrenders to death. Gollum attacks Frodo and bites off his finger, taking back the Ring for himself. In Gollum's exhilaration, "he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell" (Tolkien, *Towers* 925). Judas dies as a result of his treachery. In Acts, Judas falls and all of his internal organs burst from his body. With Gollum's last selfish act, the Ring is destroyed and the mission succeeds. Frodo is permanently scarred from this scuffle; his missing finger becomes another physical reminder of his journey in years to come.

After the War of the Ring, the crowning of King Aragorn and Frodo participates in the restoration of the Shire and passes on its care to his followers in a way that is similar to Gandalf's actions in Gondor. Restoring the Shire requires a battle to defeat Saruman's forces. Frodo does not actually fight in the battle but serves more in the role of peacemaker. He becomes the mayor of the Shire for a short time in order to establish peace among the hobbits. Like Christ names Peter as his successor, responsible for establishment of the Church, Frodo imparts his duties to Sam. Frodo has

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recorded the story of the War of the Ring in the book Bilbo gave to him, but he gives the book over to Sam, telling him, “I have quite finished, Sam...the last pages are for you” (Tolkien, *Return* 1004).

Sam becomes mayor of the Shire after Frodo’s tenure and replants the scourged lands with soil from the Lady Galadriel. After his resurrection, Christ ascends into heaven. In a single moment of ascension, both Gandalf and Frodo sail out of Middle-Earth to the Grey Havens. Together they are the complete Christ figure, leaving the care of the world to their followers. Apart from his physical pains and sufferings, some of the strongest evidence paralleling Frodo to Christ comes through his relationships with other characters. As are presentation of the human aspect of Christ, it follows that Frodo’s most important connections would be to other beings in Middle Earth rather than a connection to divinity in another realm.

Another key individual in Christ’s ministry is John the Baptist. The gospels speak of John the Baptist as Christ’s predecessor, delivering a message of repentance and heralding Jesus’ coming. John proclaims, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stop down and untie the thong of his sandals.”(Mark 1:7) John essentially writes the first chapter of Christ’s story, baptizing him into his ministry. Just as Jesus inherits his ministry from John, Frodo receives his burden from Bilbo. Bilbo has literally written the beginning of Frodo’s story by recording his original adventure from *The Hobbit* in a book he gives to Frodo, the same book Frodo will later pass on to Sam. Frodo is also symbolically baptized into his inheritance at Bilbo’s 111th birthday party. At this time, Frodo is turning 33, an important age in a hobbit’s life: “the date of his coming of age” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 30). Bilbo announces in his birthday and after his speech, Bilbo disappears from the Shire, leaving behind his home and many of his possessions for Frodo. These possessions include the One Ring, marking the official beginning of Frodo’s own story and quest. Jesus calls his disciples out of their ordinary lives as fishermen (Mark 1:16-20).

This loyal group of companions aids Christ’s ministry and follows him around Palestine. Frodo gathers his followers who pledge their loyalty to him and his quest. Like the disciples, Frodo’s companions do not initially understand the true nature of the task. Sam is excited to follow Frodo, exclaiming, “Me go and see the Elves and all! Hooray!” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 73). Sam is enthusiastic about the prospect of traveling to an eleven country, not recognizing the danger that lingers near. Later, once they do begin to realize the hazard of following Frodo, the company pledges their loyalty anyway. Aragorn also swears allegiance to Frodo, to help him despite the personal risk, as do all the members of the fellowship that forms after the Council of Elrond. Frodo’s group of disciples help define him as a Christ figure. Among any group of followers, however, there is always one individual who is the most loyal. For Christ, that person was Peter “Peter was the first disciple Jesus.” (Mark 1: 16) The two men are depicted as having a very close relationship; Peter is constantly expressing his love for his master and teacher. Jesus trusts Peter and imparts the continuation of Christ’s mission to him. Peter is present at all of the important events of Christ’s ministry, including his transfiguration, arrest, trial, and crucifixion. After Christ’s resurrection, he commissions Peter to feed his metaphorical flock.

Peter is a crucial character in Christ’s ministry. Frodo’s disciples, Sam are clearly the most loyal. Like Peter, he is Frodo’s first companion and the most doting. Sam journeys with Frodo all the way from Hobbiton into Mordor, the only individual to suffer the same fate as Frodo. Sam is consistent in his affections and protection for Frodo; he will follow him to the greatest danger because of his deep love for Frodo. In an example of his loyalty, Sam watches over Frodo after he is stabbed by the ringwraith on Weathertop. As Frodo recovers in Rivendell, Gandalf informs him,

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“We have been terribly anxious, and Sam has hardly left your side, day or night, except to run messages” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 233).

Sam again makes his loyalty known at the end of the Council of Elrond by volunteering himself to accompany Frodo on his journey to Mordor. Elrond remarks to Sam, “You at least will go with him; it is hardly possible to separate you from him, even when he is summoned to a secret council and you are not” (Tolkien, *Fellowship* 284). Sam will not allow any distance between him and his master. After the fellowship leaves the elfs realm of Lothlorien, Frodo makes his decision to separate from the group and continue on alone. But even then, Sam runs after him and insists on going with him. The two set off for Mordor alone. Sam shares the burden of the Ring, as Peter eventually faces his own crucifixion. Believing Frodo has died outside of the spider’s lair, Sam decides to carry out Frodo’s mission himself. He removes the Ring from Frodo’s body, “and then he bent his own neck and put the chain upon it, and at once his head was bowed to the ground with the weight of the Ring, as if a great stone had been strung on him” (Tolkien, *Towers* 716). Sam deals with the same physical struggle Frodo has endured. In *The Return of the King*, Sam literally carries Frodo up the side of Mount Doom when Frodo cannot continue the mission. Without Sam’s courage and strength; Frodo’s mission would have failed. Consequently, Frodo gives Sam the red book containing their story and entrusts him with the care of the Shire, like Peter taking on the leadership of the Church. Sam has proven himself dependable and true. As a very Peter-like character, Sam helps to cast Frodo in a Christ-like the image as a strong leader worthy of love, loyalty, and sacrifice.

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