

Hobbit Movies Loaded With Christian Wisdom

WASHINGTON—The sixth and final Middle Earth saga, “The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies,” is about to light up the silver screen.

These six epic films are based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, which are the second and third most-read novels in history.

But the authors of a new book, *The Hobbit Party*, say these tremendously popular movies and books have much more to offer than just entertainment.

They believe Tolkien’s sagas are loaded with Christian wisdom that could make the world run right and guide each viewer or reader to leading a well-lived life.

Lover of Liberty

According to co-author Prof. Jay Richards, these stories portray an entire universe of moral, government, and economic systems – one reason why he and Jonathan Witt sub-titled their book *The Vision of Freedom That Tolkien Got and the West Forgot*.

“Tolkien had more to offer than just a really good yarn,” Richards told CBN News. “There’s a theme throughout *The Lord of the Rings* of a concern over the centralization of power. The ring itself—the ring of power that the good guys spend the entire story trying to get rid of, not trying to gain, has this power to dominate the will of others.”

The evil, power-crazed Sauron came out of Tolkien’s experience of witnessing the freedom-obliterating brutalities of Nazism and fascism in World War II and the Cold War Communist

cruelties that followed.

Tolkien had faced horrifying trench warfare himself in World War I and hated the senseless slaughter of war. But he loved liberty even more, so his heroes constantly fought for it in his books.

"The good guys in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* recognize that sometimes you need to fight, you need to be willing to die," Richards said. "And the cause in every case that they're willing to die for is freedom."

Hobbit-Size Government

Tolkien said he himself was a hobbit in all but size. The Shire where hobbits lived reflected not only his most idyllic childhood hometown, but the way he thought society should run—a place of almost no laws and only a tiny bit of government.

He admitted to his son Christopher in a letter that he leaned towards anarchy and hated the idea of people lording it over other people.

"Tolkien said famously, 'It is the most improper job of any man to boss others, least of all those who seek the opportunity,'" Richards explained.

Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* as he watched his homeland Britain sliding into a soft socialism that was slowly sapping the freedoms of his countrymen.

He was horrified the citizens of the Christian nations would give up their God-given liberty in exchange for security offered by all-powerful governments.

Tolkien could relate to similar concerns expressed by the famed 19th century traveler and writer Alexis de Tocqueville.

After years of keenly observing America, de Tocqueville wrote

in 1840s *Democracy in America* that he feared it and like nations would come under the sway of a future ruling power that would cover “the surface of social life with a network of petty, complicated, detailed and uniform rules.”

“It does not break men’s wills but it does soften, bend and control them,” he wrote.

“Rarely does it force men to act but it constantly opposes what actions they perform,” De Tocqueville continued. “It does not destroy the start of anything but it stands in its way; it does not tyrannize but it inhibits, represses, drains, snuffs out, dulls so much effort that it finally reduces each nation to nothing more than a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as shepherd.”

Tolkien was hopeful art like his could wake people up and shake them up.

Smaug: No Capitalist Dragon

As for economics, many of the millions of college kids and hippies who consumed *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* dug them because they imagined Tolkien as a cool anti-capitalist who created creatures like the aristocratic dragon Smaug as his way to show it.

But Richards and Witt believe Tolkien used the character in *The Hobbit* to illustrate the absolute worst traits of a wealthy, non-investing, non-capitalist.

“He sits atop literally a pile of gold that belongs to other people. He’s not the entrepreneur; he’s not the businessman who’s investing and putting his wealth at risk,” Richards pointed out.

“This is not a critique of the capitalist or the entrepreneur,” he said. “This is a critique of the miser who hoards his wealth rather than puts it at risk. That’s what

enterprise is about.”

Tolkien portrayed prosperous worlds of robust capitalism, free markets and free trade at the end of both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

“A widening trade not just between different human populations or different cities, but actually inter-species trade between hobbits and dwarves and elves and men,” Richards explained.

Humble Hobbits as Heroes

Frodo’s faithful gardener Sam personifies at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* the world working at its best as he creates wealth with his hands and the future with his extremely fertile wife.

“It puts together both our economic activity as creatures made in the image of God to steward and to till and keep the garden, and also to multiply, to have children,” Richards said of this portrayal of Sam.

“It’s being fruitful and multiplying that for Tolkien becomes the symbol of real human flourishing,” he added.

The deeply Christian Tolkien intentionally used humble hobbits as heroes—his way to show that even the least of us deeply matters and can change our world for the better.

“It would only occur to someone who had this vision that the Creator of the universe would become incarnate as a man born of a woman in a stable in a humble village,” Richards said. “It’s only that kind of vision that would lead someone to think to create heroes like hobbits.”

Near the climax of *The Lord of the Rings*, it’s the humble servant Sam who literally hoists and bears Frodo like a cross up to where the ring of power can be destroyed and thus saves the world.

“And I hope that speaks to us as human beings,” Richards said. “Especially those of us who might think, ‘Who am I? What important position am I playing?’ Well, take some inspiration from Frodo and from Sam.”

Tolkien as Teacher

Many conservative Christians over the decades have read Tolkien for entertainment, but have gone to an uber-capitalist like Ayn Rand to learn their free-market economics and political philosophy.

The problem is her heroes’ and heroines’ R-rated escapades and almost furious atheism also present stumbling blocks.

That’s why Richards is quick to suggest Tolkien’s works might be a wiser place to learn economics and good governance.

“They could be used much better than books like *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand to teach kids economics and politics,” Richards opined.

“So I hope that Christian parents will think of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* in that light,” he said. “Allow them to tutor your children in their moral and political and economic intuitions.”