



ST. GREGORY'S ABBEY

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A black and white photograph of a forest. The background is filled with tall, thin trees, their trunks creating a vertical pattern. The foreground is dominated by a field of tall grasses and a cluster of small, light-colored flowers on the right side. The overall mood is serene and natural.

Abbey Letter

no. 246

Summer 2011

St. Benedict says:

Listen...incline the ear of your heart



So be a **summertime monk** for two weeks or more

at

St. Gregory's Abbey,
a Benedictine monastery
in the Episcopal Church
at Three Rivers, Michigan.

Worship & Pray, Work & Learn with the monks

...if you are male, 18 to 50, and if you can spend some time at the abbey during July. The only charge is \$25 for registration.

For more information and an application form, use the bound-in envelope or write:

Summer Program Director
St. Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, Michigan 49093-9595
novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org

NOTES

Fr. William continues his ministry to the Formation Group of the Diocese of Northern Indiana. This group of people preparing locally for ordination meets every few months for mutual exchange, discussion, and presentations concerning practical issues pertaining to ordained ministry. Fr. William is in charge of the spiritual life part of the program.

Br. Abraham is scheduled to meet with a group of inmates at the Louisiana State Penitentiary June 9th – 10th. Later that month, he will be a speaker at the 2011 Dallas Benedictine Experience from June 22nd – 26th.

Br. Abraham has had another choral symphony published online. MP3s of individual movements and PDFs of full

scores, piano reductions, and orchestral parts of *A Symphony of Psalms* are available at webbermusic.com. All files are free, but donations can be made at the publisher's website. Hard copies can also be purchased from the publisher.



Daily Schedule at St. Gregory's Abbey

Weekdays

4:00 a.m. MATINS
 6:00 a.m. LAUDS
 8:15 a.m. TERCE
 EUCHARIST
 followed by work period
 11:30 a.m. SEXT
 noon lunch
 siesta
 2:00 p.m. NONE
 followed by work period
 4:30 p.m. teatime
 5:00 p.m. VESPERS
 followed by meditation
 supper
 6:00 p.m. community recreation
 7:00 p.m. (Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays)
 7:45 p.m. COMPLINE
 (on Tuesdays and Thursdays, COMPLINE is prayed privately)

Sundays and Major Holidays

5:30 a.m. MATINS & LAUDS
 8:30 a.m. TERCE
 EUCHARIST
 noon SEXT & NONE
 12:30 p.m. lunch
 siesta
 4:00 p.m. teatime
 5:00 p.m. VESPERS
 followed by meditation
 6:30 p.m. supper
 7:45 p.m. COMPLINE

Words in ALL CAPS signify public prayer services in the abbey church. Community meetings, private prayer, scripture reading, hobbies and other personal activities are worked in around the public schedule. Slight variations of the schedule occur at times.

Baptizing the Imagination

In *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis describes his chance encounter with a book he found in a book stall in a train station that played an important role in his conversion to Christianity. Its title was *Phantastes* and its author, George MacDonald. With hindsight, Lewis realized that, through the novel's enchanted landscape, his "imagination was, in a certain sense, baptized." Here, Lewis uses the term "baptized" in a sub-Christian sense to show how the vision of George MacDonald led him to Christianity. At the time he first read the book, he was overwhelmed, drenched, by the enchantment of MacDonald's writing. Only later was Lewis overwhelmed by the grace of his baptism when he returned to the faith of his youth, at which time he also appreciated how deeply MacDonald was inspired by the Gospel.

In *Phantastes*, Lewis "saw the common things drawn into the bright shadow" of MacDonald's novel. The same can be said of any good fantasy story. It is impossible to see trees the same way after meeting the Ents in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Every fresh snowfall is more enchanting after having read of Will Stanton's first journey through a time warp to a wintry landscape in Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising*. The unicorn in Madeleine L'Engle's *The Swiftly Tilting Planet* is so luminous that it casts a spell on everything for ever after. (Isn't that what unicorns are for?)

Much of the enchantment of fantasy stories is that they draw us into a world different from the world we normally live in. Usually, imaginary worlds are populated by elves and dwarves, dragons and unicorns. One common way a fantasy world differs from our normal world is the presence of magic. In the wizard world of the Harry Potter books, magic is so pervasive that it constitutes that world's technology. Mrs. Weasley uses magic to cook dinner as routinely that we muggles turn on an electric stove. Some detractors of these books have complained about the magic in Potter's wizard world, but the presence of magic and its power offers an analogy to the scientific and technological power in our world. Just as magic is a power available for villainous misuse by the likes of Voldemort, so science and technology have the same potential if its users are not morally and spiritually grounded. What C.S. Lewis said about reading *Phantastes* applies to the Potter books: "There was no temptation to confuse the scenes of the tale with the light that rested upon them or to suppose that they were put forward as realities." In a magnificent set of novels about a magically gifted boy, Charlie Bone, by Jenny Nimmo, the gifts are fanciful and unique and so are less easily confused with occultism. Charlie's gift, for example, is the ability to move in and out of pictures such as photographs and paintings, a gift that becomes highly significant in the course of the series.



An imaginary world must show us what kind of world it is, and in so doing, it makes us ask ourselves what kind of universe we live in. Lewis' imagination was baptized by MacDonald's novel because, in the end, he saw in Fairyland a reflection of what is true about our world. It is possible, of course, that some fantasy stories might not baptize the imagination in the same way as MacDonald's did. In a way, fantasy worlds are thought experiments that allow us to try other worlds on for size to see what rings good and true about our world.

In defining its world, a fantasy story inevitably puts evil in a cosmic setting. In Susan Cooper's overtly pagan *The Dark is Rising* sequence, the Lords of Light and Lords of Darkness battle each other on roughly equal terms in a dualistic world. On his eleventh birthday, Will Stanton discovers that he is an Old One who must choose which side he will align himself with. The grim Old Ones help humans in peril from the Dark Lords, but they aren't all that friendly, and the power of evil remains an abiding menace that no force can overcome. On the other hand, in *The Lord of the Rings* J.R.R. Tolkien illustrates the Catholic teaching that evil is a lack of substance more profoundly than any theology book possibly could. The Ringwraiths, not to speak of Sauron himself, have lost all substance. There is nothing underneath the ringwraiths' capes, yet they are truly horrifying in their nothingness. The traitor Saruman caps a life gone to moral ruin by melting before Frodo's eyes. Likewise, Voldemort, in the Harry Potter books, has reduced himself to a barely existing malevolent force through dividing his soul into seven items called horcruxes. But the problems in the wizard world cannot all be blamed on Voldemort. Those who oppose this dark lord are undermined by political and social corruptions. The enslavement of elves by "good" and "bad" people alike is only one serious symptom. The bad treatment that Harry's godfather, Sirius Black, inflicts on his family's enslaved house elf, Kreacher, has bad consequences for Harry and his friends. In *Phantastes*, Anodos releases a shadow that haunts him for the rest of the story when he opens a door a wise woman told him to leave shut. To combat the evils in Fairyland, Anodos must overcome this darkness that he himself is responsible for.

Goodness is also placed in a cosmic dimension, primarily through magical helpers such as fairy godmothers or talking animals. Such tales suggest that we live in a friendly universe where grace from a higher source is available. The Firebird, for example, gives Prince Ivan a feather that allows him to call her in time of need. In the Charlie Bone books, three uncanny reddish cats known as the Three Flames come to the aid of Charlie and his friends when needed. The fiery imagery of the cats tempts a Christian reader to think of the Holy Spirit. The comical angels Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and Mrs Which help Meg and Charles Wallace rescue their father from a totalitarian planet and then help Meg rescue her brother when he is captured there. In *The Swiftly Tilting Planet*, a time unicorn guides Charles Wallace in his rescue mission through time to avert a nuclear war. Aslan's ventures into Narnia are particularly overt illustrations of Divine Providence. *The Lord of the Rings* suggest Divine Providence through the ministry of the magician Gandalf, but more important to this epic is the providential shape of the story as a whole. It is not Frodo who successfully fulfills the anti-quest of destroying the Ring of Power; it is Divine Providence using the loathsome Gollum that accomplishes it.

Contrary to these stories, Philip Pullman's series *His Dark Materials* shows a world empty of transcendent helpers. What supernatural creatures there are prove to be malevolent for the most part. Pullman so empties his world of Christ that there is no indication that Jesus or his teaching ever happened in any world. Rick Riordan's set *Percy and the Olympians* brings back to life the Greek and Roman gods where divine providence takes the form of strife between deities who either care little for humans or positively wish to destroy them. Many horror stories suggest that the most powerful beings in the universe are demonic.

Acts of transcendent aid are closely intertwined with moral issues. The Firebird gives Prince Ivan a feather because he took pity on her and freed her instead of keeping her as a hunting trophy. The Flames don't help just anybody, but only those who are aligned with the good intentions of the Red King, the distant ancestor of the magically gifted people in the books. The aid Meg Murray received from her angelic helpers would not have been enough to rescue Charles Wallace if she had not loved her brother so deeply. A phoenix comes to Harry Potter's aid because of his



love for Dumbledore. More importantly, the grace that delivered Harry after his act of sacrifice at the end of the series would have availed nothing if he had not saved the life of his enemy Draco Malfoy not just once, but twice. Likewise, the fulfillment of Frodo's quest depended on his sparing Gollum against Sam's better (but worse) judgment. Contrary to the other stories just mentioned, the heroic journey Will and Lyra make to the land of the dead where everybody is tormented to rescue a friend has no support from a friendly universe. Rather, these two children have to work against the grain of a mostly hostile universe. Likewise, the revived Greek and Roman deities offer Percy and his friends no real moral compass, leaving them with only their own fidelity to each other.

In *Phantastes*, Anodos is killed when he unveils a demonic religious cult, but then is lifted out of Fairyland and restored to his home where he is alive with a much deeper perspective on life than he had before. Harry Potter and Aslan also die, or seem to, and then continue to live on a higher plane. These and many other stories that follow the outline of the Paschal Mystery baptize the imagination by imagining the world as ultimately redemptive through self-sacrifice in love. However, it is the Gospel which has baptized the human imagination so as to make these stories conceivable. Lewis said his imagination was baptized by MacDonald's novel, but MacDonald's imagination was baptized by the Gospel. It is the imagination baptized by the Gospel that opens our eyes to the shape of the Paschal Mystery in the last Harry Potter book and even in the graceless world of *His Dark Materials*. Will and Lyra's rescue mission to the land of the dead is most likely modeled on Orpheus' attempted rescue of Eurydice, but this venture also has the shape of Christ's harrowing of Hell. It seems that even the imaginations of some atheists are baptized by the Gospel. Death and resurrection is a common scenario in myth, but the Gospel claims to be what Lewis called many times: "Myth become fact."

Anodos, Harry Potter and Aslan, in their acts of self-sacrifice, are themselves rescued by a power deeper in the universe than the evil that tried to kill them. Rowling leaves this deeper power rather vague but it is strong enough to bring Harry's dead parents as well as Dumbledore to him as living beings who advise and encourage him in the final steps to defeating Voldemort. When Aslan appears more alive than ever after his death, he points to a deeper writing in the altar on which he was killed, a writing the witch queen could not read. When musing on his renewed life, Anodos recalls a wise woman who assured him that she "knew something too good to be told." The baptized imagination discerns this deeper goodness underlying all worlds, a great good that is ever coming, something too good to be told.

Q: What do you do at the monastery all day?

A: Look on our website to find out. We have a video section featuring a virtual tour of the monastery buildings, a slideshow showing various aspects of monastic life, and a section of four seasonal videos describing activities at the monastery through the year.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org



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St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

Saint Gregory's Abbey is the home of a community of men living under the Rule of Saint Benedict within the Episcopal Church. The center of the monastery's life is the Abbey Church, where God is worshiped in the daily round of Eucharist, Divine Office, and private prayer. Also offered to God are the monks' daily manual work, study and correspondence, ministry to guests, and occasional outside engagements.

The continuing existence of Saint Gregory's is made possible by the support of those who believe that the contemplative vocation within the Church finds valid expression there.

The monks ask your prayers and will be grateful for your offerings.

<http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org/donate.html> to donate online

Donations may be mailed to:
Saint Gregory's Abbey
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