

Unremembered Loss

For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss.

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I was wondering this last month what makes my fantasy story different from others? Why would I call mine a Christian fantasy? Three months ago I wrote about, "Where is God in Christian fantasy?" This month I'm looking at the question, "Where is God's love, especially during the scenes of violence and conflict?" I've shown God's love in the aftermath, but is God also the god of the battle?

Douglas G. Clarke

Love

In a Christian fantasy novel, one of the underlying precepts must be love. While the story may not be about love, when someone reads the story they should be able to see that God loves the world and those who know him will reflect that love in the way they live their lives.

Does that mean that love must drive the story? I don't think so. The characters in the story may face hoards of enemies, may witness brutality, may suffer betrayal, may feel abandoned, or may lose hope. Any one or more of these may be the thing that drives the story. It is how the characters in the story handle these things that is at the core of the story.

Is love the response to these situations? Again the answer is no. We may say that we should love our enemies, but in the middle of a battle love is probably not the way the characters view the enemy, unless they believe that what is best for the enemy is death and release from the cursed existence.

Likewise the response to brutality is horror, to betrayal is anger or disillusionment, to being abandoned is confusion, and to loss of hope is despair.

So where is love?

Violence

In most fantasy novels that take place in a medieval setting, violence is either just a part of life or it is the result of the key problem that is driving the story. In both cases, the characters must deal with the violence of the enemy and usually the violence of their side as well.

When the characters of the story are the ones being violent, the reader often can glimpse the motivation behind the characters actions. Are they fighting because they have to, because their existence depends on it? Are they angry because of an injustice? Are they seeking revenge, or are they afraid?

As the heroes are slicing down the enemy, and maybe even joking with each other about who has killed more of the foul beasts, what sets them apart from the enemy they are slaughtering?

Is it that they are defending their homes and their families? Is it that the enemy they are facing is evil and it is good to destroy evil?

If so, where is the love?

Good and Evil

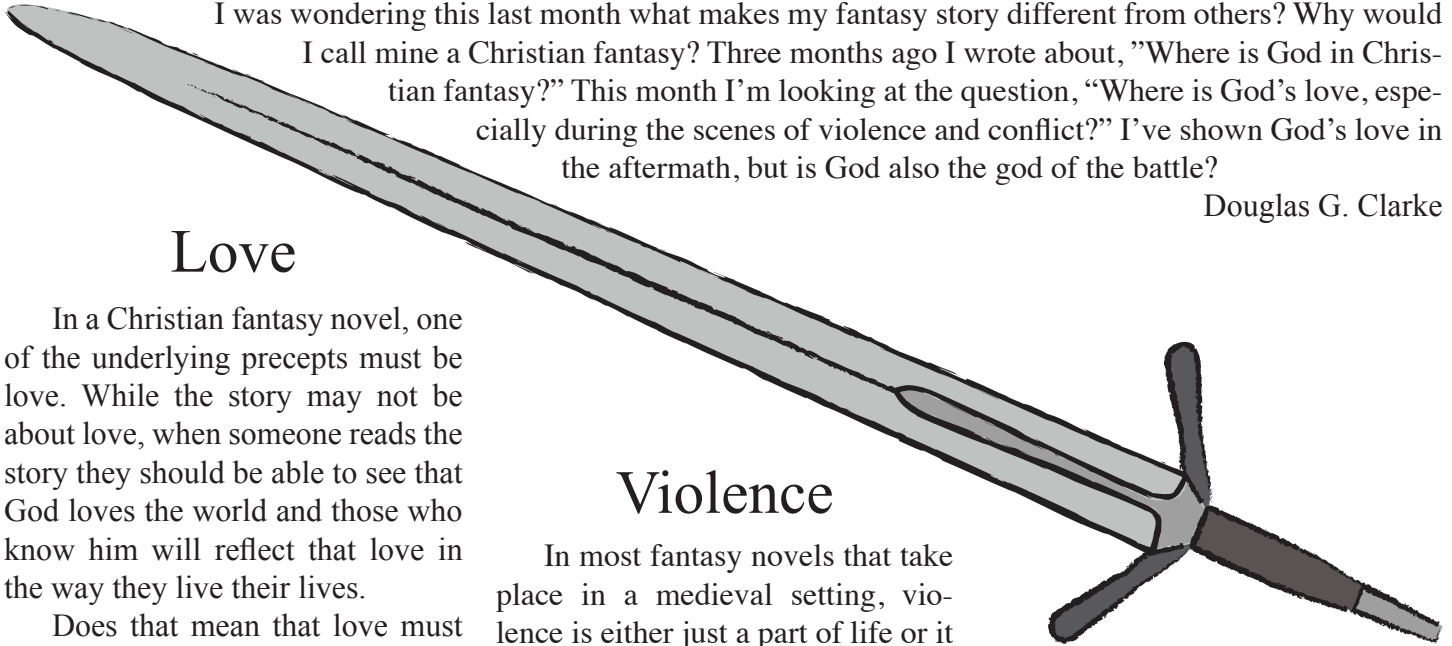
Often a fantasy story pits good against evil. The evil is trying to destroy the good's way of life, and the good must defeat the evil in order to survive.

It is easy to paint the face of evil - greed, hate, cruelty, brutality, betrayal, and aggression are all things, that when taken to the extreme, most people would agree are "bad."

Painting good is trickier. It is easy to say, "He is loyal." It is harder to show a character being loyal. How do you show the opposite of the above list, especially in the midst of battle? Generosity, love, mercy, gentleness, loyalty, and restraint.

Most of the time evil is painted so well, that good is just left as, "Not that."

The problem is that, "Not that," is not showing love.

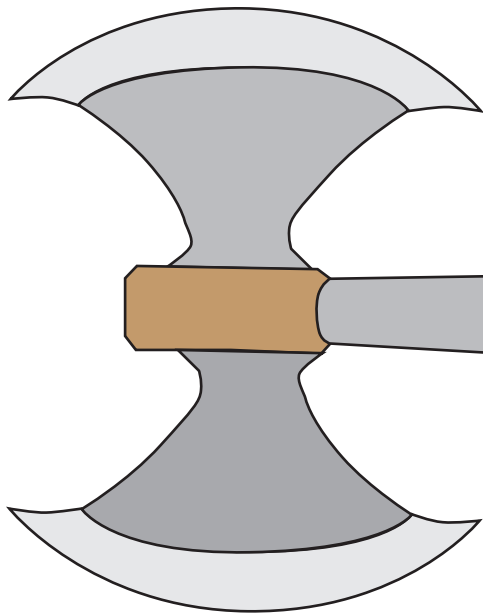


Love In Action

One of the things I often say to my Boy Scouts is that. "It is easy to be friendly towards your friends, and courteous to those who are courteous to you." In the same way it is easy to love those who love you. The proof of one's convictions is to love those who hate you.

What is love? A feeling? No, that warm feeling you get is affection. Love is an act of the will, it is a decision and a commitment. Love is a decision to want what's best for someone else. In reference to God, love is wanting God's blessings for the person being loved. Love is about the person being loved, not about the person doing the loving. When someone can say, "I want God to bless you and guide you, even if that means I get hurt or you get taken away from me," then what they are talking about is love.

In the midst of a battle can there be love?



Loving Friends

In the heat of battle, having a focus on something other than the enemy right in front of you can be hazardous to your health, but if you love your comrades then you have to keep them in mind as well.

One of the differences between an evil army and a good one is how the soldiers treat each other. It would not surprise anyone of an orc used another wounded orc as a shield; he would probably have died anyway. Likewise having a person step in front of an incoming blow to save a friend would be looked on as a heroic act.

The Marines have a saying, "No man left behind." The orcs have one too, "Leave no advantage untaken." In this context love is watching your friend's back, stopping in the middle of battle to tend to a wound, risking one's own life to save another, and watching for emotional and physical fatigue in others and doing something about it before the friend collapses.

Love is also giving others an anchor point so fear, hatred, and anger don't take them over.

Loving Enemies

So is there any place for loving your enemies while in battle? How about showing mercy to a fallen foe? How about not shooting someone in the back? Is the offering to accept their surrender an act of love?

As I wrote my story the thing I focused on was why my heroes were fighting. When someone starts fighting from anger or hatred, I show how their tactics change. Are they trying to win or try to destroy?

If the stakes are high there is no option but to win. But what do you leave in your wake? Do you wipe out the enemy to the last man, or do you rout them and let them retreat? It may be true that if you let them retreat that you may have to face them again, but how does this compare to genocide?

The question is, can your acts of love, of mercy, change the enemy's heart? Is there a chance that they might learn and start loving as you have? If the answer is yes, then giving God the chance to change them is the loving thing to do.

In the end love is making the right choice even if you don't feel it.

Is There Love In Violence?

There better be. Without love there is only brutality, anger, and hatred, which builds on itself after each act. Without love an army turns into a mob or horde. Sure, you can keep your troops organized and disciplined through

fear. But in the heat of battle, when it is my life or our lives, without love I will choose what is best for me. Love and fear can both be motivators, and in a battle showing that love can be the better one, not just because it is right, but because it actually works better, is one way to present the values at the heart of the Christian message.

Thank God, that God is the god of battle. Without his love as a guide, most battles would likely degrade into massacres and blood baths, and those emotionally scared would be left to their own devices.