GANZ – #23 - REWILDING THE WORD (OCTOBER 2026)



John 12 (NJB): [27] Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say: Father, save me from this hour? But it is for this very reason that I have come to this hour. [28] Father, glorify your name![1]

C.S. Lewis, Letter to Sister Penelope CSMV (BOD) on 12 January 1950 – "Term begins on Saturday, and there is a cruel mail to-day, so I am suffering incessant temptation to uncharitable thoughts at present: one of those black moods in which nearly all one's friends seem to be selfish or even false. And how terrible that there should be even a kind of *pleasure* in thinking evil."[2]

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[1] *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Jn 12:27–28.

[2] C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 3 (New York: HarperCollins e-books; HarperSanFrancisco, 2004–2007), 6.

C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, Chapter 9, pp. 109-110 – "I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time most balanced and capacious, minds praised most, while the cranks, misfits, and malcontents praised least. The good [literary] critics found something to praise in many imperfect works; the bad ones continually narrowed the list of books that we might be allowed to read. The healthy and unaffected person, even if luxuriously brought up and widely experienced in good cookery, could praise a very modest meal; the dyspeptic and the snob found fault with all. Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, *praise almost seems to be inner health made audible*." [My emphasis]

George Washington (1732-1799), composed in the personal copybook that he kept as a boy: "Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire – conscience."

J.K. Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows*, Chapter 2, "In Memoriam" – "Albus Dumbledore was never proud or vain; he could find something to value in anyone, however apparently insignificant or wretched, and I believe that his early losses endowed him with great humanity and sympathy."

A Story

By the time we have read our way into the second volume of Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, Book IV, Chapter 8, we have had countless chances to form a conviction that Gollum is, as they say, bad to the bone. We feel as Sam Gamgee does, who in his suspicion of and fury at the creature Gollum, calls him by the name "Stinker", reducing him by that name to a noxious odor. We feel grateful for noble Sam – so consistently good and loyal, as true a friend as one might wish to find, even if only once in one's life. When he perceives so accurately the deep-set viciousness and treachery of Gollum, we are thankful for Sam's resolute clarity, because Frodo has been too consistently kind to Gollum (we are convinced), feeling pity for his lot – *Pity*: "The disposition to mercy or compassion; clemency, mercy, mildness, tenderness."

> **Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (1991)**, a key point in the book summarized by Anthropic Fable 5: "Stark noted that classical Roman and Greek philosophers regarded mercy and pity as pathological emotions—defects of character to be avoided. Mercy was seen as unreasonable because it involved providing unearned help, contrary to justice. Christianity, by contrast, made mercy a primary virtue and taught that God requires believers to love and care even for strangers."

We say, "Sam, I'm with you on this. You are right about Gollum. Don't let Frodo be deceived."

And yet … we must be careful.

There is a moment late in the great story, when Gollum is leading the two hobbits up a secret stair in the mountains (the Ephel Dúath), which will give them access from the west into the land of Mordor – it had taken them ninety days walking from Rivendell to get to Mordor (1,300 miles!). The hobbits lay in exhausted sleep with Gollum looking on. (I recently learned that Tolkien considered this moment the most moving in the whole story.) To our complete surprise, in the morally darkest place in Middle Earth, there came a hidden (divine) grace *to Gollum*!

> **J.R.R. Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings, *The Two Towers*, Book IV, Chapter 8 – "The Stairs of Cirith Ungol", pp. 304-305** – "Gollum looked at them. A strange expression passed over his lean hungry face. The gleam faded from his eyes, and they went dim and grey, old and tired. A spasm of pain seemed to twist him, and he turned away, peering back up towards the pass, shaking his head, as if engaged in some interior debate. Then he came back, and slowly putting out a trembling hand, very cautiously he touched Frodo's knee – but almost the touch was a caress. For a fleeting moment, could one of the sleepers have seen him, they would have thought that they beheld an old weary hobbit, shrunken by the years that had carried him far beyond his time, beyond friends and kin, and the fields and streams of youth, an old starved pitiable thing.

For a moment he feels *love* for Frodo, who had always treated him well, and, when necessary, protected him from harm. *We had not expected this* – the tenderness and poignance of that gesture, his emaciated arm reaching out toward Frodo who sleeps. That "wavering flame" of love in him begins to turn Gollum back to who he was before the Ring devoured him. For the smallest moment, *we see him*, him appearing from a place *deeper than Sauron, the Dark Lord, can get to in him* (such an important point to grasp). Sméagol, a simple hobbit, who had been so damaged and alone for so long, is given a choice *not* to betray Frodo. To our surprise, we feel in ourselves *the kindling of care* for Gollum.

Did you notice how that same hidden Presence in the story has worked in us also?

> **Charles Wesley (1707-1788) composed in 1747**:
>
> Love divine, all loves excelling,
> Joy of Heav'n to Earth come down,
> Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
> All thy faithful mercies crown;
> Jesus, thou art all compassion,
> Pure, unbounded love thou art;
> Visit us with thy salvation,
> Enter ev'ry trembling heart.

But then the good-hearted, noble, honest, worthiest of hobbits, Sam Gamgee, *destroys in Gollum the miracle of grace that was happening in him* by the stairs of Cirith Ungol. Sam awakens, misinterprets Gollum's gesture, and scolds Gollum so harshly, and wrongly, that in a stroke the "wavering flame" of love in Gollum is extinguished. Gollum will now resolutely betray them.

It is possible that Christians exist in the world to complete one great Deed, *as a habit*: never to give up on those whom everyone has written off as hopeless. But "not giving up" refers to a Christian superpower: the ability to perceive in a lost soul where the "wavering flame" of God's presence still burns in him or her, and then to serve it, to seek to fan it into flame.

> **2 Timothy 1 (NJB)**: 6 That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift of God that you possess through the laying on of my hands. 7 God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power and love and self-control. 8 So you are never to be ashamed of witnessing to our Lord, or ashamed of me for being his prisoner; but share in my hardships for the sake of the gospel, relying on the power of God 9 who has saved us and called us to be holy—not because of anything we ourselves had done but for his own purpose and by his own grace.[3]

Good people can bring about great evil, when they are convinced that they *know* who their human enemies are, and how they could not possibly become good, could not possibly *want* to become good. It must be considered a most diabolical failure of Christianity in a Christian when he or she hates people whom he or she is convinced is deserving of their hatred.

> **Matthew 18 (NJB)**: 6 But anyone who is the downfall of one of these little ones who have faith in me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck. 7 Alas for the world that there should be such causes of falling! Causes of falling indeed there must be, but alas for anyone who provides them! [4]

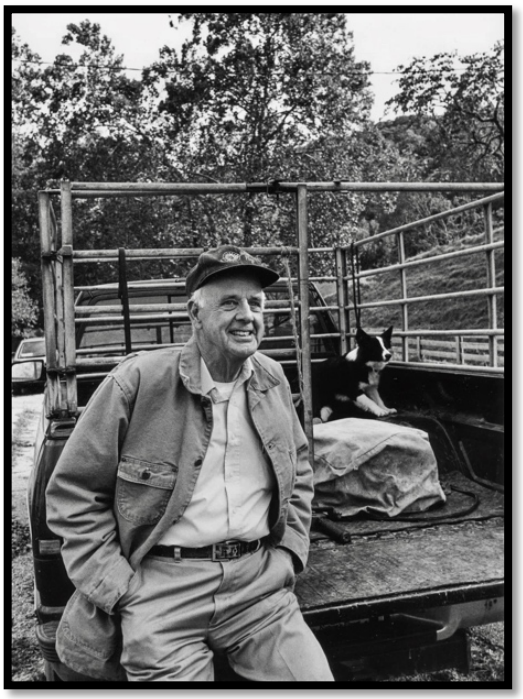
We must be careful (ask Jonah!) whom we write off as being outside of any chance of divine grace.

Text

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[3] *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), 2 Ti 1:6–9.

[4] *The New Jerusalem Bible* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 1990), Mt 18:6–7.



Wendell Erdman Berry (1934 to 31 August 2026)

"Enemies"[5] by Wendell Berry[6]

If you are not to become a monster,
you must care what they think.
If you care what they think,

how will you not hate them,
and so become a monster
of the opposite kind? From where then

is love to come—love for your enemy
that is the way of liberty?
From forgiveness. Forgiven, they go

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[5] Wendell Berry, "Enemies" from *Entries: Poems*. Copyright © 1994 by Wendell Berry. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.

[6] Wendell Erdman Berry (1934 to 31 August 2026). *Britannica*: "Wendell Berry (born August 5, 1934, Port Royal, Kentucky, U.S.—died August 31, 2026, Port Royal) was an American author whose nature poetry, novels of America's rural past, and essays on ecological responsibility grew from his experiences as a farmer. His best-known nonfiction work is *The Unsettling of America* (1977), a defense of farming practices that work in harmony with nature and a polemic against agribusiness and its impact on the land. Berry's writing was praised for its clear, graceful language and its consistent centering of the importance of agrarian values."

free of you, and you of them;
they are to you as sunlight
on a green branch. You must not

think of them again, except
as monsters like yourself,
pitiable because unforgiving.

A Close Reading of the Text

You must care what they think … a monster of the opposite kind – We pay particular attention to the poet's repetition of the verb "to care". We associate that verb in typical usage with a good thing in us, with attentiveness and thoughtfulness towards another person or some circumstance. "You must care" what monsters think. Why? Because in order to identify a monster, and to keep him or her that way, we *must* know why he or she is monstrous. Why? Because we humans care a great deal to recruit others to despise the monsters we identify. We *want* confederates in this unholy work of a cultivated hatred, and so we supply them with reasons.

We become "monsters of the opposite kind".

> You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
> You've got to be taught from year to year,
> It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear—
> You've got to be carefully taught![7]

The poet challenges us to consider how ugly it is for us to spend time keeping enemies as our enemies, and to become articulate to others as to the reasons why. Is this not in our day normalized?

We must be careful.

A Prayer

Vox Clara Ecce Intonat (in part, 6th century)

> A thrilling voice by Jordan rings,
> rebuking guilt and darksome things:

[7] Lyrics from a song in the musical *South Pacific*: https://rodgersandhammerstein.com/song/south-pacific/youve-got-to-be-carefully-taught/.

vain dreams of sin and visions fly;
Christ in His might shines forth on high.

Now let each torpid soul arise,
that sunk in guilt and wounded lies;
see! the new Star's refulgent ray
shall chase disease and sin away.

The Lamb descends from heaven above
to pardon sin with freest love:
for such indulgent mercy shown
with tearful joy our thanks we own.[8]

[8] For the complete text in its original Latin with an English translation: https://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Hymni/VoxClara.html.