



# Why Modern Fantasy Lost Reverence

*When fantasy abandoned mystery, holiness, and sacred awe.*



*“The world is charged with the grandeur of  
God.”*

— Gerard Manley Hopkins

Modern fantasy has become very good at darkness.

Kingdoms collapse. Heroes fail. Gods lie. Empires rot. Violence spreads across the page with brutal honesty. In many ways this evolution was necessary. Fantasy could no longer survive as simplistic escapism where evil wore black armour and goodness remained untouched by suffering.

Readers demanded stories that acknowledged corruption, trauma, political decay, moral compromise, and the terrible cost of power. The rise of modern grimdark answered this demand. Yet somewhere along the road toward realism, fantasy quietly lost something older.

It lost reverence. Not religion alone. Reverence — the sense that there exist realities greater than appetite, power, irony, or survival. The sense that holiness might still matter. The sense that beauty can remain sacred even while the world burns around it. Sacred Grimdark was born from this absence.



## The Age of Disenchantment

Much modern fantasy inherits the spiritual exhaustion of the modern world. Institutions fail. Authority corrupts. Faith becomes hypocrisy. Power consumes. These observations are not entirely wrong. History itself provides enough evidence.

The problem begins when fantasy moves beyond criticising corrupted holiness and begins rejecting the possibility of holiness altogether. The cathedral becomes merely political. The priest becomes merely manipulative. The relic becomes merely magical technology. The sacred is reduced to aesthetic texture without transcendence.



## Grimdark and the Loss of the Sacred

Traditional grimdark emerged partly as a reaction against naïve heroism. Its greatest strengths remain undeniable: moral complexity, psychological realism, political consequence, and the understanding that violence scars everyone involved.

Yet many grimdark worlds eventually drift toward the same philosophical conclusion: nothing is sacred. The result is emotionally powerful in the short term. Over time, a strange exhaustion settles across the genre. Because if nothing is sacred, then suffering loses scale. Sacrifice becomes merely transactional. Redemption becomes impossible. And darkness itself begins to flatten.



## Tolkien and the Older Vision

J.R.R. Tolkien understood something modern fantasy sometimes forgets: darkness only matters because light exists. Middle-earth contains grief, betrayal, genocide, corruption, temptation, and long defeat — yet Tolkien never abandons reverence. The stars still matter. The songs still matter. Mercy still matters. Even Gollum's final role in the destruction of the Ring depends upon mercy surviving inside catastrophe.

Without reverence, The Lord of the Rings would become mere military fantasy. Instead it became myth. Because Tolkien preserved transcendence. The world remained spiritually alive. Sacred Grimdark inherits this instinct directly. Not optimism. Not sentimentality. But the refusal to surrender eternity.



## Reverence and Scale

Reverence gives fantasy scale. Not physical scale. Spiritual scale. Without reverence, kingdoms are merely political systems, cathedrals are scenery, relics are artifacts, and prophecy becomes plot machinery. With reverence, kingdoms carry moral consequence, cathedrals become witnesses, relics carry memory, and prophecy becomes terrifying.

A cathedral slows the soul. A relic changes atmosphere. A prayer alters emotional gravity. Reverence restores weight to the imagination.

*“The forms of all things become charged with religious  
significance.”*

— Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*

*Preserved from a monastic commentary, faded at the edge.*



## The Return of Mythic Hunger

Despite modern fantasy's skepticism, readers remain hungry for reverence. The enduring power of Tolkien. The resurgence of mythic fantasy. The fascination with Gothic cathedrals, liturgical aesthetics, sacred horror, folk horror, ancient mythologies, and stories where evil still fears holiness.

Readers do not merely want darkness. They want meaning surviving inside darkness. They want transcendence under siege. They want candles still burning when the world insists they should have gone out centuries ago.



## The Candle Still Burns

At its deepest level, reverence is not optimism. It is defiance. The refusal to believe that corruption is the highest truth. The refusal to surrender eternity to cynicism. The refusal to let darkness become ordinary.

Sacred Grimdark exists because fantasy still needs cathedrals. Still needs bells. Still needs candles carried through impossible night. And somewhere beneath the ruins of modern disenchantment, readers are beginning to search for those lights again.



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