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Davidsen, M.A.

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Author: Davidsen, Markus Altena
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Chapter 16. Legendarium Reconstructionism: A Case Study of Tolkien-based Religion

In the previous chapters of part II we have seen how elements from Tolkien's literary mythology have been integrated into existing traditions of fairy spirituality and Neo-Paganism in many different ways. This chapter explores how some Tolkien religionists go one step further, seeking to construct a spiritual tradition focused exclusively, or at least primarily, on Tolkien's Legendarium. The discussion focuses on two groups in particular, Tië eldaliéva (Qu: The Elven Path; founded 2005) and Ilsaluntë Valion (Qe: The Silver Ship of the Valar; founded 2007). The two groups emerged online in the years after Peter Jackson's *LR* movies, but do not draw much on the movies for inspiration. Instead, they draw extensively on *HoMe* and *S*, supplemented with Tolkien's letters and essays, the appendices to the book version of *LR*, and minor pieces of Tolkien's that were not included in *HoMe*, but have been published elsewhere.

Ilsaluntë Valion hived off from Tië eldaliéva in 2007, but the two groups continue to work closely together. Since their inception, the two groups combined have had a core membership of 7-9 individuals who have contributed substantially to the development of the groups' rituals and spirituality. There has been little turnover in this core group. The two groups have also had a stable amount of peripheral members who read the forum and perhaps use the groups' rituals, but who contribute little to the development of the groups. The number of peripheral members has stayed within the 10-20 range, but in this group the turnover has been significantly higher than in the core group.

One fundamental principle underlies the religious practice of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion: Tolkien's Legendarium sets the borders for the groups' collective spiritual project. That is to say, the groups' rituals are designed to explore the Legendarium and the Legendarium alone, though forum discussions can involve a comparison of Tolkien's literary mythology with other mythologies. In contrast to the Tribunal of the Sidhe, for example, rituals in Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are always aimed at communicating with the Valar and the Quendi; members never address deities from other pantheons. The two groups' ideal is to avoid religious blending and the members of Ilsaluntë Valion stress this by distancing themselves from "syncretic" uses of Tolkien's texts in their Charter. The ambition has instead been to construct a full-fledged and independent tradition by systematising the scattered information on narrative religion in *HoMe* and by adding 'Tolkien-true' inventions by the members to fill out the gaps where needed. In practice, some degree of religious blending has proved unavoidable, but loans from

other religious traditions have been restricted to ritual techniques and to strategies for rationalisation and justification. Furthermore, such loans have been adapted and 'Tolkienised' through a process of inward acculturation so that members no longer experience them as foreign to the Legendarium. For these reasons, the Tolkien spirituality of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion must be categorised as fiction-based (and Tolkien-based) in the strict sense of the word, i.e. as 'religion that takes fictional texts as its very foundation'. It is not merely fiction/Tolkien-integrating religion, i.e. 'religion integrating belief elements from fiction, re-enacting fictional rituals, and/or adapting identities from fiction' (cf. chapter 2).

For lack of a better term, I refer to the religionising style of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion as 'Legendarium Reconstructionism'. I do so because the two groups' approach to Tolkien's literary mythology to a large extent mirrors how Reconstructionist Pagans approach pre-Christian mythologies. It is furthermore similar to how the so-called Reconstructionist wing of the Tolkien language community uses Tolkien's Elvish languages.

Reconstructionist Pagans are characterised by three things. First, they concentrate on one particular mythological corpus, such as Celtic or Greek mythology. In this respect they differ from 'eclectic Pagans' who freely combine across traditions. Second, Reconstructionist Pagans, as the name suggests, seek to reconstruct the ancient religion to which their mythology belongs. In principle, they have a *Sola Scriptura* approach that takes the written sources to be the ultimate arbiters of which beliefs and practices can be considered legitimate within the tradition. This approach entails a problem, however, for often the sources include myths only, but no descriptions of how to perform rituals. In practice therefore, the sources can be supplemented with new material in two ways – and that is the third characteristic of Reconstructionist Paganism. Reconstructionist Pagans adopt modern rituals from established branches of Neo-Paganism, especially Wicca, and have developed sophisticated divinatory and interpretive procedures to achieve knowledge ("gnosis") of cosmological, theological, and other matters on which the mythological sources are silent.

In the Elvish language community, the term Reconstructionism carries a slightly different meaning than in modern Paganism. Traditionally, the Elvish language community simply studied Tolkien's own writings in Quenya and Sindarin together with his writings about these languages (e.g. on phonology and etymology), but during the so-called ELF-conners controversy in the early 1990s a Reconstructionism faction began to challenge this emphasis on Tolkien's own use of the Elvish languages. The Reconstructionists wanted to go beyond Tolkien's texts to 'recreate' a canon of standard Elvish by (re)constructing new words based on the known Elvish vocabulary, using the same techniques as linguists employ when reconstructing lost word forms in dead languages.[480] They also used Tolkien's languages creatively, for instance for the composition of

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[480] The most important product of this endeavour is David Salo's *Gateway to Sindarin* (2004).

poetry. The Reconstructionists were opposed by the so-called ELF-conners, the editorial team in charge of publishing Tolkien's linguistic material on behalf of the Tolkien Estate. Led by *Vinyar Tengwar*[481] editor Carl F. Hostetter, the ELF-conners defended the status quo of 'studying but not using' Tolkien's languages and suggested that the dictionaries, grammars, and poetry produced by the Reconstructionists infringed the copyright held by the Tolkien Estate. As a result of the ELF-conners controversy, in the Elvish language community Reconstructionism has come to connote a relatively free *use* of Tolkien's languages as opposed to the mere *study* of them. In their own self-understanding, the Reconstructionists are the truer heirs to Tolkien's languages as they aim to emulate Tolkien's creative spirit. The Elvish Reconstructionists received a gigantic boost when their leader, David Salo, was asked to write the Elvish dialogue for the *LR* movies.

The Legendarium Reconstructionists of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion approach Tolkien's literary mythology in much the same way as Pagan and Elvish Reconstruction-ists. Most importantly, they have adopted Tolkien's pantheon (the Valar) and creatively reconstructed an Elven ritual calendar. They also explore Tolkien's mythological world to achieve gnosis that can shed light on aspects of this world that are not described in de-tail in the written 'lore'. Furthermore, the two founders of Tië eldaliéva answered affir-matively when asked in a radio interview in August 2007 on Eclectic Pagan Podcasts whether their path could be characterised as Reconstructionist.[482] They confirmed that their path was Reconstructionist in character because it "stays true to the Legendarium". They also emphasised, however, that they did not use this designation themselves be-cause they felt it to give the wrong impression that they were recreating the religion "of the Elves 5000 years ago or something" when in fact they were constructing a path that was "useful for humans today". This does not make their practice different from Pagan Reconstructionism, however, for also Pagan Reconstructionists ultimately create new traditions for the present time rather than aiming to revive ancient cultures precisely. Norse Reconstructionists or Heathens, for instance, sacrifice fewer horses and meditate more than did the Vikings.

Since Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are intimately connected, it makes the most sense to discuss them together. In this chapter, I will therefore draw on material from both groups to analyse Legendarium Reconstructionism as a mode of Tolkien religion. The chapter builds on very extensive communication with Calantirniel (Lisa Allen) and Nathan Elwin, the two co-founders of Tië eldaliéva, and with Gwineth and Eruannlass,

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[481] *Vinyar Tengwar* (Qu: Newsletters) is a journal published by the Elvish Linguistic Fellowship (E.L.F.). The fellowship's homepage can be found at http://www.elvish.org/VT/ [140114]. The Elvish Linguistic Fellowship hosted four E.L.F. cons between 1991 and 1994. Bill Welden, who organised most of the E.L.F. cons, still regularly organises conventions about Tolkien's invented languages, now under the name Omentielva. See http://www.omentielva.com/index.htm [090214].

[482] The podcast can be downloaded from http://eclecticpagan.libsyn.com/webpage/epp-26-the-elven-path [300712]. The discussion of the term Reconstructionism can be found around the 40th-43rd minutes of the interview.

who both have later served as 'Captains' (or main moderators) in Ilsaluntë Valion. The discussion is based also on additional interviews with Llefyn Mallwen (T-e) and with Ellenar, Lomelindo, Turwaithian, Elfwillow, and Sinziana (IV), and on analyses of the homepage of Tië eldaliéva (at various points in time) and of the public section of Ilsaluntë Valion's forum. Additionally, I draw on a large body of information on rituals, including 79 written formats and 14 recordings of Skype rituals. I participated in one of these Skype rituals myself in September 2009 with members of Tië eldaliéva. For this chapter, I have also used a 2007 podcast interview from Eclectic Pagan Podcasts with Calantirniel and Elwin and a number of published, written sources, namely two interviews with Calantirniel about Tië eldaliéva (Giles 2009; Carding 2012, 257-260) and a few short pieces written by Calantirniel herself (2008a; 2008b).[483] Finally, I have met in person several times with Gwineth of Ilsaluntë Valion. Gwineth and Elwin of Ilsaluntë Valion, and Calantirniel and Alyras of Tië eldaliéva, have kindly commented on a draft of this chapter.

The chapter falls into four sections. In the first section, I sketch the history and social organisation of Legendarium Reconstructionism online. As I will demonstrate, Tië eldaliéva did not emerge out of thin air, but was preceded by other groups and swallowed up a few of these. Measured in membership and activity level, Tië eldaliéva peaked during the years 2006-2007, but the group increasingly struggled with differences of opinion on how to approach the Legendarium most properly. This resulted in the hive-off of Ilsaluntë Valion in late 2007. Yet, this was as much a re-start of the group as a schism, for most members joined Ilsaluntë Valion, and even those who continued to identify with Tië eldaliéva were allowed to join the new Ilsaluntë Valion forum with the status of 'Honored Guests'. On some occasions in 2008, the two groups even did Skype rituals together, and some members hope to revive this practice in the future. Going into the background of the members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, I show that the core members were engaged in Neo-Paganism, Tolkienology (i.e. intellectual Tolkien fandom), or both before joining. In broad terms, Legendarium Reconstructionism can thus be seen as a convergence of Tolkienology and Pagan Reconstructionism, just as Middle-earth Paganism can be conceptualised as a convergence of *LR* fandom and eclectic Wicca (cf. section 14.2.1 above). Even so, both Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion include non-Pagan members, most of whom are Christians. To some extent, Pagans and non-Pagans have been able to work together, but not all non-Pagans in Ilsaluntë Valion have been comfortable with the strong Neo-Pagan influence. In late 2012, they therefore created an independent sub-forum on the Ilsaluntë Valion site which they named Anima Mundi (Soul of the World) and on which they discuss their explicitly non-Pagan and "gnostic" spirituality.

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[483] The podcast can be downloaded from http://eclecticpagan.libsyn.com/webpage/epp-26-the-elven-path [300712].

In the second section I discuss religious blending in Legendarium Reconstructionism, focusing the analysis on the groups' collective rituals. I choose this focus, partly because I have more detailed information on the rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion than on the rituals of any other group within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, and partly because the ritual formats provide a condensed overview of the groups' core beliefs. The members of Tië eldaliéva originally created a core ritual by adapting Wiccan circle-casting to Tolkien's literary mythology in a manner inspired by the Fifth Way Mystery Group's High Elvish Working (cf. ch. 13 above). Furthermore, they crafted an Elven ritual calendar with solar and lunar observances by combining evidence in the lore with inventions of their own. After the hive-off, Ilsaluntë Valion reworked both the lunisolar calendar and the ritual format to make it fit the Legendarium more closely. The members expelled all non-Tolkienesque notions (e.g. references to chakras), substituted some of the Wiccan-inspired rites for Legendarium-based inventions of their own, and changed the overall structure of the ritual from an evocation of the Valar to a journey in the imagination to the Blessed Realm. Two processes of ritual invention can be discerned in the development of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion's collective rituals. One is the blending process of inward acculturation by which rites from Wicca and ceremonial magic were adapted to Tolkien's literary mythology and increasingly assimilated. The other process is intra-traditional elaboration, here in the form of the invention of ritual elements that emulate existing rites, but are constructed bottom-up as strictly Legendarium-based alternatives. The group rituals originally took place via the phone or on Skype, but this practice was eventually given up. Gradually, it became normal practice to carry out the group rituals individually, and this allowed for an increased importance of individual rituals that did not strictly follow the group format.

The third section concerns the rationalisation and justification in Legendarium Reconstructionism. As I will show, there is general agreement on four things: (1) There exists a non-physical dimension of reality which one can tap into in meditation; (2) Tolkien's narratives, letters, and essays demonstrate that Tolkien himself had experiences of this aspect of reality; (3) Tolkien's works therefore provide a "means of transportation" into this other reality; and when using his works as such (4) one can communicate with the Valar and the Quendi. Opinions differ, however, on three other things, the first two of which pertain to rationalisation. The first point of disagreement concerns the relation of Middle-earth to our own world. Some members consider Tolkien's Middle-earth to correspond in some way with the distant past of our physical world, while others consider both the Blessed Realm *and* Middle-earth to exist within the non-material sphere of reality, often referred to as the Imaginal Realm or Faery. In other words there is tension between a mytho-historical and a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. A related point of disagreement concerns the nature of the Quendi, the Elves of Tolkien's writings. Some members feel that the Quendi refer to a class of beings who used to inhabit the physical world as corporeal beings and whose genes can still be found in the human gene pool. Others perceive the Elves in more spiritual terms

and consider it possible for humans to possess partly Elven souls, or argue that the Elves exist only within the Imaginal Realm. The third point of disagreement concerns justification rather than rationalisation. Members disagree on the question whether it is possible to argue for or even prove the reality of the Valar and the Quendi and of Tolkien's narrative world, and on the related questions whether such an attempt at objectivisation is necessary or desirable. This debate does not only take place internally in Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, but also involves clashes with Legendarium Reconstructionists who are not members of these groups. Concluding the third section, I revisit the hypotheses on *HoMe*-based religion formulated in chapter 15 to evaluate whether Legendarium Reconstructionism has in fact taken the form which *HoMe*'s repertoire of religious affordances led me to predict.

In the fourth and final section, I revisit the question why the Legendarium Reconstructionist online communities have been relatively more successful and stable than the online communities discussed in chapter 14. As possible reasons I suggest superior forum moderation and group leadership together with the presence of older and more knowledgeable members. Also of importance is the very fact that Legendarium Reconstructionism draws on a much larger text corpus than Middle-earth Paganism. With *HoMe* as one's foundational text corpus, there is simply more to digest and discuss and that alone makes for longevity compared to spirituality based mainly on the *LR* movies.

16.1. History and Social Organisation of Legendarium Reconstructionism

Tië eldaliéva was founded in August 2005 on the initiative of two Americans, Nathan Elwin and Calantirniel. In this section, I sketch the history and social organisation of this group and its successor, Ilsaluntë Valion. I give also some information on the members of the two Legendarium Reconstructionist groups, pertaining both to numbers and social profile. I begin with a short overview of the events that led up to the formation of Tië eldaliéva.

16.1.1. The Prehistory of Legendarium Reconstructionism Online

By 2005, Elwin had been searching for almost three decades for people sharing his conviction that Tolkien's Legendarium was not just fiction, but "mytho-history with euhemeristic elements". He had started his search in the mid-1980s, first through bulletin board systems and FidoNet and later on the Internet. Along the way, Elwin had found many individuals who used Tolkien's works spiritually, but unlike Elwin, who wanted a strictly Legendarium-based spirituality, these other individuals always embedded a selective use of Tolkien's literary mythology within another, usually Neo-Pagan, framework.

Elwin felt most affinity with individuals who asserted that Tolkien's works included a deeper form of esoteric knowledge or 'gnosis'. In particular, a lecture by Stephen Hoeller called "J.R.R. Tolkien's Gnosis for our Day" made a strong impression. In this lecture, the long-time leader of the Ecclesia Gnostica in Los Angeles explained that Tolkien had visited the Imaginal Realm and that his narratives reflected the gnosis which Tolkien had so achieved.[484] Upon listening to Hoeller's lecture around 2001, Elwin decided to found a group himself devoted to the "gnostic" exploration of the Legendarium, but the initial attempt mostly attracted the attention of "detractors" wanting to make fun of his project. A few years later Elwin bought and read *The Magical World of J.R.R. Tolkien* (Knight 2001), a book by the British occultist Gareth Knight. Like Hoeller, Knight emphasised the gnostic character of Tolkien's writings, but Elwin ultimately found that he was more interested in fitting the Legendarium into his own esoteric system than in exploring it for its own sake. Even so, Elwin did value an elaborate pathworking ritual by Vivienne O'Regan which was published as part of the book (Knight 2001, 49-71). This ritual would later be among the sources of inspiration for Legendarium Reconstructionist rituals.[485]

Perceiving in 2005 that the spiritual interest in Tolkien was booming as a result of the *LR* movies, Elwin decided to try again to create an online community for individuals interested in a mytho-historical and gnostic exploration of Tolkien's literary mythology. In February 2005 he founded the newsgroup UTolk (short for United Tolkienists) on Yahoo Groups! and this time, Elwin attracted people who sincerely wanted to work spiritually with Tolkien's literary mythology. As we have seen in chapters 11 and 14, a large number of spiritual Tolkien groups sprung up on Yahoo Groups! around this time,

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[484] In section 16.3 on rationalisation, I return to the meaning of the terms 'gnosis' and 'the Imaginal Realm'. Hoeller's lecture was given on 2 October 1998 and has been online since late 1998. It can be downloaded from http://bcrecordings.net/store/index.php?main_page=page_4 [300114]. The website of the Ecclesia Gnostica can be found here: http://www.gnosis.org/eghome.htm [300114].

[485] Knight is an occultist in the tradition of Dion Fortune and his book offers an interpretation of Tolkien's writings as "a fleshing out of Qabalistic doctrines" (2001, 13). Knight's interpretation floats between a mythopoeic and a mytho-cosmological reading of Tolkien's literary mythology. On the one hand, Knight characterises Tolkien as a "mythopoeic writer" (2001, 8, 46) and considers the Valar to be expressions of more fundamental archetypes (2001, 17). As a mythopoeic work, Knight emphasises that Tolkien's mythology constitutes "basic material" for magical work and "sequences of initiation" that is as adequate as any other mythology (2001, 4). On the other hand, Knight sometimes adapts a mytho-cosmological stance, stating that Tolkien's Legendarium tells the accurate history of another world located on the astral ethers. Knight speculates that Tolkien's "imagination was reading off deeper levels of existence and experience that had an objective validity of their own" (2001, 39). He even goes so far as to suggest that Tolkien was "reading the akashic records", i.e. that he had "imaginative access to the record upon the subtle ethers of all that has ever happened" just as it has been claimed about Madame Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, and Edgar Cayce (Knight 2001, 39). The book on Tolkien's magical world was originally published in 1990 as a part of a larger work, *The Magical World of the Inklings* (Knight 1990). O'Regan's pathworking ritual was already included in this version (Knight 1990, 136-151).

and not surprisingly, Tolkien-integrating Pagans and self-identified Elves found their way to UTolk.[486] This was much to Elwin's dismay, for in his eyes these Pagans and Otherkin were misusing the Legendarium by reinterpreting it according to spiritual world-views other than its own. Even so, the Elves, some of whom identified straight-out as Quendi, were allowed into UTolk together with Pagans of various backgrounds, and many of these individuals joined Tië eldaliéva upon its inception later in 2005.

UTolk was Tië eldaliéva's most direct precursor, but Middle-earth Reunion: The Alternative Tolkien Society must also be mentioned. Like UTolk, Middle-earth Reunion was a meeting place for individuals interested in a spiritual approach to Tolkien's literary mythology, and both Elwin and other Tolkien religionists subscribed to the society's journal, *Reunion: the Journal of Middle-earth Studies*. More importantly, it was *Reunion*'s editor Martin Baker who introduced Elwin and Calantirniel, the two founding members of Tië eldaliéva, to each other.[487] It is furthermore worth introducing Middle-earth Reunion at some length, as the society not only facilitated the birth of Legendarium Reconstructionism proper, but also illustrates that there are many individuals with Legendarium Reconstructionist tendencies outside those online groups which are the focus of this chapter.

Middle-earth Reunion was founded in 1996 as a so-called "smial" (i.e. division) of the Tolkien Society, but broke off from the mother-organisation in 2001. *Reunion*, the alternative society's quarterly magazine, was published from 1996 until Baker withdrew in 2005 and both journal and society were discontinued.[488] The subtitle of the journal, *The Journal of Middle-earth Studies*, suggests an intellectual fanzine devoted to Middle-earth Studies (or Tolkienology),[489] but the journal also printed articles about fey apparitions

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[486] United Tolkienists is still located at http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/utolk [121213]. Since the end of 2005, it has no longer been open to non-members and it is mostly used as a safe place to store links and other material.

[487] Also other Tolkien religionists besides Elwin and Calantirniel subscribed to *Reunion*, including Laurasia of Middle-Earth Pagans. After losing contact with Martin Baker, members of Ilsaluntë Valion later established close contacts with other former contributors to *Reunion*. The Martin Baker who used to edit *Reunion* is not the same person as the Martin Baker who did audience research on the reception of the *LR* trilogy and whose work was cited in the general introduction.

[488] The society's homepage is still online and selected articles from the journal are still available. Middle-earth Reunion can be visited at http://alt-tolkien.com [100114]. A selection of articles authored by roughly 20 different contributors can be read at http://alt-tolkien.com/byissue.html [100114].

[489] Intellectual Tolkien fans use the terms Middle-earth Studies and Tolkienology to distinguish their diligent studies of Tolkien's writings from the activities of the mainstream fan culture around *LR*. The two terms are synonyms. Middle-earth Studies/Tolkienology takes account of *S* and *HoMe* and is devoted to the study of Tolkien's world as if it were a real world. Rather than role-playing in Middle-earth or writing fan fiction, Tolkienologists learn Quenya and write articles such as 'Flowers and Trees in Middle-earth' or 'Power-structures in Hobbit Society', to take two imagined examples. Along another axis, Middle-earth Studies can be distinguished from Tolkien Studies, where the latter refers to studies of Tolkien's texts which

and articles connecting Tolkien's narratives to Western esotericism.[490] Baker himself contributed an article on pathworkings within Tolkien's world.[491] Most importantly, Baker wrote a whole series of articles in which he claimed that the "Tresco manuscript", which had come into his possession via a certain Alice Bailey, proved the historicity of the Legendarium.[492]

It is not always easy to determine how serious the contributions to *Reunion* were. As far as I can determine, Baker and the other contributors were seriously interested in Western esotericism and considered Tolkien's literary mythology to be spiritually powerful in the same way as other myths. The articles about fey apparitions also seem to express a sincere belief in the reality of elves, even if it remains unclear whether the authors believed that their own unusual experiences indeed were encounters with elves. Baker's articles on the Tresco Manuscript extended Tolkien's feigned history ploy by cementing the connection between Middle-earth and Anglo-Saxon England which Tolkien had never managed to develop to his own satisfaction.[493] Even so, Baker did not consider his work to be mere fan fiction, but told Elwin that to him the Tresco Manuscript and related lore was "intensely "real", if not "actually" true".[494]

Like Elwin, Calantirniel found her way to Middle-earth Reunion where Baker put the two in contact with each other. The journey that took her there was very different from Elwin's, but Calantirniel's background and discovery of Tolkien's literary mythology is more typical for the members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion in general. Calantirniel's spiritual journey began when her former boss, an attorney who used astrology to win his cases, drew up a birth chart for her (2008a, 189). Completely baffled by the divinatory power of this technique, Calantirniel went on to study astrology herself,

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ultimately attempt to shed light on something *outside* the textual universe, for example Tolkien's personal beliefs, his mythological sources, or the intended 'message' or 'morale' of his stories.

[490] The articles on fey apparitions include one by Baker (http://alt-tolkien.com/r13home11.html [100114]) and one by the British artist Ruth Lacon (http://alt-tolkien.com/r18hawthorn.html [100114]). An article by Rey Arnold on Tolkien's world related to the Qaballah and the Tarot can be accessed here: http://alt-tolkien.com/r12qabbala.html [100114].

[491] The pathworking article can be accessed at http://alt-tolkien.com/r2pworking.html [100114].

[492] The most important article on the Tresco Manuscript is entitled "New Middle-earth: Exploring Beyond the Mountains". It was published in *Reunion* 1 (June 1996) and can be accessed online at http://alt-tolkien.com/samples/r36/r36nme.html [090114].

[493] Baker states that his article neither concerns the actual world, nor Tolkien's narrative world, but a third, "sub-created world" which he refers to as "New Middle-earth". This world is "[t]o all intents and purposes […] identical to the primary world we all inhabit, with one important exception: within it the 'Middle-earth' related by the late Professor JRR Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* is not fiction, but historically true". See http://alt-tolkien.com/samples/r36/r36nme.html [090114]. Baker's reference to an Alice Bailey must be a nod to the influential British theosophist who died in 1949 and cannot be the same person as the Alice Bailey from whom Baker allegedly obtained the manuscript in the early 1990s.

[494] Baker wrote so in an email to Elwin dated 6 April 2005.

and when I first talked to her in 2009, she worked professionally as an astrologer and had also been certified as a healer within several traditions, including Reiki and flower essences. On a more personal level, Calantirniel began to identify as a Neo-Pagan. Bringing an astrologer's fascination with the stars into her Pagan practice, Calantirniel studied the expression of the Star Queen deity in various mythologies, as Isis, Astraea, Arianrhod, and so forth. Having Celtic and German ancestors, she wished to integrate the Star Queen within a Celtic/Teutonic Pagan tradition (Calantirniel 2008a, 191-192).

While this was going on, the *LR* movies premiered and Calantirniel became fascinated by the depiction of the Elves. In an interview in the *Psychic Times International*, she even said that she felt that "Tolkien had a more "correct" idea about the Elven archetype; more so than other mythologies and cosmologies I had explored in the past" (Giles 2009, 7). An Otherkin friend of Calantirniel's even told her that she was an Elf and asked her whether she knew it; even though Calantirniel found that too exaggerated a claim, she took it as a sign of her special resonance with elves. A few years later, in 2005, Calantirniel finally read *S* and discovered the Celtic/Germanic-inspired Elves and their main deity Varda, the Star Queen. It was a perfect fit.[495] Within a few weeks of hectic online networking she found Elwin, and together they decided to create a spiritual path embodying Tolkien's mythos. Soon she took the Elvish name Calantirniel, meaning (Lady) Guardian of the Gift of Light in Sindarin.

Most of the members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion tell stories of spiritual seeking and homecoming which are similar to Calantirniel's, though not always as elaborate. Most have a background as Neo-Pagans of some sort and are either long-time Tolkien fans or became deeply moved by the movies and went on to read the books. Common for them all is that they feel that Tolkien's literary mythology "resonates" better with them than does any other mythology or tradition. Besides Elwin and Calantirniel, the core group that founded Tië eldaliéva in 2005 or joined later and helped develop the group during 2006 and 2007 included the following individuals: (1) Lomion, a Wiccan who helped make the Tië eldaliéva "birthing ritual" (cf. section 16.2 below); (2) Llefyn Mallwen, a Canadian practitioner of witchcraft, energy-work, and Ninjutsu; (3) Niennildi, Elwin's wife and a metaphysical Christian; (4) Lomelindo, who had a background in Heathen Reconstructionism and had been active in Middle-Earth Pagans and in the

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[495] An account of the spiritual awakening and search that led Calantirniel to Tolkien-based Elven spirituality has been published in the *Llewellyn's 2008 Witches' Companion* (Calantirniel 2008a). Editor Sharon Leah changed the order of the paragraphs, however, so that it is seems that Calantirniel first became intrigued with the Star Queen in her expression as Varda and only subsequently went on to study expressions of the Star Queen in other mythologies. In fact, the chronology was the reverse, and one wonders whether editor Leah consciously wanted to downplay the primacy given by Calantirniel to Tolkien's mythology. In any case, Calantirniel distributes the original version of "How the Star Queen Changed My Life" (2013a) through the Tië eldaliéva website. Calantirniel has also published a number of other small pieces, including 24 spells (or short meditations) in the *Llewellyn's 2009 Witches' Spell-A-Day Almanac* (Calantirniel 2008b) of which five are related to Tië eldaliéva.

Legendarium Reconstructionist group Faer en Edhel Echuiad (Si: the Spirit of the Elf Awaken Again); and (5) Ellenar, who had practised different forms of ceremonial magic and Paganism and says that he has been able to communicate with fairies and elementals since childhood.

16.1.2. The History of Legendarium Reconstructionism Online I: Të Eldaliéva

It is useful to distinguish between two phases in the development of Legendarium Reconstructionism online, a formative phase from 2005 to 2007 and a consolidation phase from the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off in November 2007 to the present day. The formative phase was characterised by a collective feeling of having found a spiritual home and by optimism about the group's future cohesion and growth. Leading up to the official launch of Të eldaliéva with the 'birthing ritual' on 23 August 2005, a group of core members had settled on a name for the new group and devised the format for the birthing ritual. In the time that followed, the ritual format was further developed and collective rituals were performed over the phone and later on Skype on the occasion of all the solar and lunar holidays of Të eldaliéva's own Elven ritual calendar (cf. section 16.2 below).[496] On 23 January 2006, a discussion forum was launched on the bulletin board hosting site Freebb.com, and the forum remained active until Freebb.com closed its services on 30 August 2007.[497] In early August 2007, a homepage was also launched which included general information about the group, a breakdown of the group's main beliefs, and an elaborate FAQ section.[498]

Sections 16.2 and 16.3 below discuss Të eldaliéva's rituals and beliefs in more detail, so let me here just point out three things that characterised the group in its first years of existence. First, the Të eldaliéva presented itself as an Elven form of spirituality. This is witnessed by the meaning of the group's very name, The Elven Path, and as Calantirniel put it, the guiding question in developing this path was 'What would the Elves do?' Indeed, Të eldaliéva declared on the homepage that the group's aim was to "re-create, as closely as possible the original spirituality and way of the Elves, and in

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[496] Already the birthing ritual was done over the phone. In December 2006, Të eldaliéva began to use Skype instead of the phone and also began to record their rituals. I have a number of recorded rituals from the period December 2006 to September 2007.

[497] The forum was hosted at http://51.freebb.com/tieeldalieva/. The various posts and articles on the forum are no longer avaible, but the forum homepage has been captured by the Wayback Machine as it looked on 16 March 2007. See http://web.archive.org/web/20070316070517/ http://51.freebb.com/tieeldalieva/ [140114].

[498] Të eldaliéva's original homepage used to be situated at http://www.lassiquendi.com/ TheHiddenRealm/ and at http://www.thehiddenrealm.org, but is no longer online. Portions of the homepage have been captured by the Wayback Machine. The main page, as it looked on 8 August 2007, can be accessed here: http://web.archive.org/web/20070810184835/ http://thehiddenrealm.org/ [240114]. Through the left-hand menu one can link to the "Beliefs" page and to the "FAQ" page. Other portions of the original homepage have not been saved.

particular of the "Quendi" […] described in JRR Tolkien's […] writings".[499] Everyone who resonated with the "Elven archetype" or felt to be an "elf-friend" interested in the "innate wisdom of the Elves" was welcomed. Given this profile, it is not surprising that Tië eldaliéva attracted members from other, less successful, Tolkien-affirming Elven groups. Especially, Tië eldaliéva swallowed up core members from the Eldalondë Society and from Faer en Edhel Echuiad, a group that had been active from December 2004 to mid-2006 and was explicitly focused on reviving the religion and culture of the Grey-elves in Middle-earth during the Second Age.[500] The members of Tië eldaliéva made it clear, however, that their group was not an Otherkin group. While the Tië eldaliéva members sympathised with the Otherkin's fascination with elves, they also found them too obsessed with their identity and too far-going in their claim to be non-humans trapped in human bodies. Rather than focusing on Elven identity, Tië eldaliéva focused on the *wisdom* of the Elves. The group's members identified primarily as humans, though they believed it to be possible for humans to possess a partly Quendian soul or some portion of Quendian genes.

Second, Tië eldaliéva was Reconstructionist in character. On the original home-page, the group compared its approach to that of Reconstructionist Heathens and referred to *S* as a kind of "Bible" for their path and more generally to Tolkien's Legendarium as the "framework or BASIS".[501] A core aim was therefore to build a tradition of rituals and beliefs based on Tolkien's mythology, including a standard ritual format, a ritual calendar, a system of correspondences based on the fourteen Valar, and tradition-specific symbols. In the process, the group drew on *HoMe* and *Letters* as well as on *S*. Both in interviews with me and on the homepage, members of Tië eldaliéva clearly distanced themselves from Middle-Earth Pagans and similar groups who in their eyes merely integrated random pieces of Tolkien's literary mythology into a Wiccan frame. Tië eldaliéva wanted a tradition based exclusively on the Legendarium, though it was considered legitimate to add beliefs and practices that had no explicit grounding in Tolkien's texts as long as no information in the Legendarium explicitly spoke against it and a strong need was felt for them to be included. While members sought to keep the Elven Path exclusively Tolkien-centred, they considered it merely one valid spiritual path among others.

The third characteristic of Tië eldaliéva was its Neo-Pagan profile. Most members saw Tië eldaliéva not only as one spiritual path among others, but as one *Pagan* tradition

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[499] This information was given on the group's main page.

[500] The Eldalondë Society was a Tolkien-affirming Elven group that took its name from Eldalondë, a port city on the Western coast of Númenor whose name means "the land-locked haven of the Eldar". The Eldalondë Society still has a page on LiveJournal, see http://eldalonde-socie.livejournal.com/ [260114]. The Pro-Board of Faer en Edhel Echuiad is still online at http://shadowwolf2005.proboards.com/index.cgi [080114]. I included both groups in the overview of second wave Tolkien religion online, cf. figure 14.1 above.

[501] This information was given on the group's main page and beliefs page.

among others. After joining Tië eldaliéva, these members continued to identify primarily as Pagans and typically continued to be engaged in other forms of Paganism. While accepting Tolkien's works as foundation of Tië eldaliéva's practices, these Pagan members were therefore also interested in comparing Tolkien's Valar and Maiar with the gods and goddesses of other pantheons and in interpreting Tolkien's works in the light of various esoteric teachings.

Not all members were equally happy with the Elven, Reconstructionist, and Neo-Pagan profile of Tië eldaliéva, and it was partly unresolved tensions pertaining to these three emphases which caused the schism in November 2007. The first cause of tension was Tië eldaliéva's explicitly Elven approach. Some members did not identify with the Elves and wanted a more Mannish approach, or at least an approach open to both Elvish and Mannish perspectives. These members pointed out that many key texts in *HoMe* had a human point of view, and the tension between the 'Elvish only' and the 'blended Mannish/Elvish' takes on Tolkien's Legendarium thus reflected their defenders' relative emphasis on either *S* or *HoMe*. Second, some members with a background as non-Pagan Tolkienologists grew uneasy with the Pagan mode of Reconstruction that allowed Legendarium-foreign elements to be added to the tradition. This group wished for a purer form of Reconstructionism, exploring Tolkien's literary mythology completely on its own terms. A third and related tension concerned how the Legendarium should be approached ritually. One group preferred relatively elaborate rituals based on ceremonial magic and Wicca. Another group wanted simply to explore the Legendarium in individual meditations of a "natural shamanic" character, occasionally with the help of entheogenic allies such as Salvia Divinorum.

Ironically, the two Tië eldaliéva founders disagreed on all three points with the remaining members falling somewhere in between. Calantirniel stood for a continued Elven-centred, Pagan Reconstructionist, and ritualistic approach; Elwin wanted a balanced Mannish/Elvish, purely Legendarium-confined, and natural-shamanistic approach. Elwin decided to break off in November 2007, and a new forum for Ilsaluntë Valion was launched in December 2007.[502] I suppose that the timing of the schism was determined partly by the fact that the Tië eldaliéva forum had gone offline in late August 2007 and that a new forum was needed in any case. At any rate, the fact that Tië eldaliéva had no working forum meant that most members followed Elwin into Ilsaluntë Valion no matter whether they agreed with him or not. That is to say, the hive-off had more the character of a restart than of a schism. A handful of the original Tië eldaliéva members continued to identify as such and did not officially become members of Ilsaluntë Valion, but even so, the two most important Tië eldaliéva members, Calantirniel and Llefyn, joined the Ilsaluntë Valion forum. Officially they had the status of 'Honored Guests' rather than members, but they participate on equal terms in the discussions. Together with other Tië eldaliéva members, Calantirniel and Llefyn continued to use Tië eldaliéva's rituals, while

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[502] Ilsaluntë Valion's forum is located at http://westofwest.org/ [250114].

the members of Ilsaluntë Valion devised a new ritual format. Both groups continued doing rituals on Skype (Tië eldaliéva) or over the phone (Ilsaluntë Valion) throughout 2008, and members from both groups also did two rituals together in that year.

16.1.3. The History of Legendarium Reconstructionism Online II: Ilsaluntë Valion

The new profile of Ilsaluntë Valion was laid down in a Charter and later in a FAQ article on the public part of the forum. Regarding Elves, it was stressed that Ilsaluntë Valion was no group for Otherkin, and also not for people who profess to have an affinity with the elven archetype. It was emphasised, however, that Ilsaluntë Valion was on friendly terms with the latter group, i.e. the members who had stayed in Tië eldaliéva. Embracing a combined Mannish/Elvish approach, Ilsaluntë Valion took the notion of the Line of Lúthien (cf. section 9.2.1 above) as a cornerstone of its teachings, asserting that Maian and Elvish blood had entered the human gene pool in the past and that some humans therefore possess a divine spark and some measure of Elvishness. In any case, Ilsaluntë Valion cast the Quendi as ancestors and role models, not as a race to which they themselves claimed to belong. Concerning the mode of Reconstructionism, Ilsaluntë Valion explicitly delegitimised the adaption of Pagan and ceremonial magical elements into the group's rituals and teachings. The only additions to Tolkien's own writings that were still deemed legitimate were Legendarium-based inventions and revelations acquired in Legendarium-induced trancework. While still welcoming Pagan members, Ilsaluntë Valion made it clear in the Charter that it was not Neo-Pagan as a group.

Positively, the Charter described Ilsaluntë Valion as a "Gnostic Research Group" whose goal was to explore the Imaginal Realm, connect with its inhabitants, and to use "the knowledge thus obtained to enrich our lives and add to our collective body of knowledge". To reflect this new focus, the group chose the name Ilsaluntë Valion which means 'Silver Ship of the Valar' in Tolkien's Qenya. The name had a double symbolism. In Tolkien's mythology, Ilsaluntë is a poetic name for the moon (*LT I* 192, 255, 284). Furthermore, the Charter explains that the ship metaphor "uses the symbology of traveling the "Straight Road"". It casts the members as metaphorical crewmembers on a ship sailing from Middle-earth to the Blessed Realm. In actual practice, the members do not sail, of course, but use different imaginal techniques to visit the Blessed Realm, techniques that can better be likened to travelling the Olórë Mallë or the Ilweran, the two other 'roads' to the Blessed Realm (cf. section 15.2.3 above).[503] The Charter also stressed Ilsaluntë Valion's mytho-historical approach and initially it was the ambition of the group to supplement their gnostic research with historical research. The intention was to

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[503] The name Ilsaluntë Valion was possibly inspired by the pathworking ritual by Vivienne O'Regan included in Gareth Knight's *The Magical World of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2001). In any case that ritual is entitled "The Voyage West" and participants are required to visualise themselves as passengers on a ship setting out from the Grey Havens and taking the Straight Road to the Blessed Realm.

identify parallels between the Legendarium and the history of the actual world and to systematise them into an "Arda Timeline".

A renewed sense of optimism characterised Ilsaluntë Valion in the first couple of years after the launch in late 2007. The group hoped to grow to 25-30 active members, and in order to facilitate the integration of new members a basic curriculum was put together and a mentor institution set up. The curriculum consisted of volumes I and II of *The Book of Lost Tales* and *Morgoth's Ring*, i.e. volumes 1, 2, and 10 of *HoMe*, in addition to *S*. Furthermore, new members were made aware of *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*, *On Fairy Stories*, and the essay "Ósanwe-kenta" on thought-communication (to which I return in section 16.3). The gist of the mentor institution was that new members were assigned a mentor who introduced them to the group's basic meditation focused on the Two Trees. The idea was that once the basic meditation was mastered, new members could better appreciate the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual in which individual meditation played a more prominent role than had been the case in Tië eldaliéva. Several members who had joined in 2008 told me that they very much appreciated how their mentor had integrated them into the group. Even so, the formalised mentorship program was discontinued in 2009, partly as a result of the temporary leave of Ellenar who had served as chief mentor during 2008.

Around this time, in late 2008, Ilsaluntë Valion stopped doing collective rituals over the phone. For one part, the rituals were discontinued due to external reasons, including serious illness and the fact that European members had begun to join which made collective rituals impractical due to time zone differences. More importantly, the core members of Ilsaluntë Valion increasingly experienced it as dissatisfying to do rituals over the phone. This was partly because the rituals had been changed after the hive-off and were now less ceremonial and more focused on the individual meditative experience. Members continued to use the group's ritual formats, but increasingly did the rituals individually and irregularly. At this time, also Tië eldaliéva's regular Skype rituals came to an end, mainly because the number of active members in that group had become too small to sustain them.[504]

Though there were good reasons for Ellenar's withdrawal as mentor and for the discontinuation of the collective rituals over the phone, the two developments also reflected an increased division and individualisation within Ilsaluntë Valion. As a further sign of this, Ilsaluntë Valion began to take a turn away from Reconstructionism during 2009. While the group stayed Reconstructionist in the sense that it remained focused solely on the Legendarium, disagreements broke out on the question whether it was pos-

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[504] After the hive-off, Tië eldaliéva did not attempt to launch an independent forum and hence had little opportunity for recruiting more members. The group also did not update its homepage for several years. The current homepage of Tië eldaliéva has nothing in common with the original one, and rather has the character of Calantirniel's personal page. Even so, new members occasionally find and join Tië eldaliéva via this site. The current Tië eldaliéva homepage can be visited at http://elvenspirituality.wordpress.com/ [240114].

sible to verify gnosis. As mentioned above, the original Ilsaluntë Valion take on Reconstructionism was based on the idea that adding elements from other religious traditions to Tolkien's literary mythology is illegitimate, but that Legendarium-induced trancework can lead to reliable knowledge which can safely be added to Tolkien's own revelations. This belief had been the cornerstone in the project of collective and gradual tradition-building, first in Tië eldaliéva and later in Ilsaluntë Valion, but now became challenged by a group of members that included Elwin and Gwineth, the latter having joined Ilsaluntë Valion in the summer of 2008. Referring to Stephen Hoeller's already mentioned lecture on Tolkien and gnosis, these members stressed that imaginal experiences are qualitatively different from perceptions of the everyday world and that gnosis can therefore never be validated as fact.[505] As Elwin handed over the moderation of the Ilsaluntë Valion forum to Gwineth in December 2009, while Lomelindo, the Heathen Reconstructionist, left the group, it was clear that a strong 'gnostic' faction had emerged to challenge the original Reconstructionist profile of Ilsaluntë Valion.

In 2010, Ilsaluntë Valion entered a stable period. The core members have kept using the group's ritual formats, albeit with some individual variation (cf. section 16.2.2 below). Since 2010, the membership of the group has remained much the same. Fewer potential members have found the group since 2010 than was the case during 2005-2008 and fewer of those who found it have stayed active. There are three reasons for this. First, the spiritual interest in Tolkien generated by the *LR* movies had passed. Second, Ilsaluntë Valion had closed most parts of its forum to the public and become more reluctant to accept new members after having been ridiculed by the Skeptics' Guide to the Universe Forum during the summer of 2009.[506] Third, by identifying explicitly as a non-Pagan group and requiring new members to be both willing to research *HoMe* and be able to do trancework on their own, Ilsaluntë Valion deliberately fished only in a very small pond.

Since 2010, it has become increasingly clear that Ilsaluntë Valion includes two kinds of members. One group identify as Pagans, continue to value other ritual expressions than pure meditation, and have an interest in relating the Legendarium to other mythologies. The other group consists of members who are not Pagans, but of metaphysical Christian background or who have been raised as Christians, but no longer practise. These members are not adverse to rituals as such, but prefer them in non-Pagan form and are primarily interested in the individual, meditative exploration of Tolkien's world. Not wanting to break with the rest of Ilsaluntë Valion, Gwineth, Elwin, and Niennildi in December 2012 launched the sub-forum, Anima Mundi, as a place to discuss what they

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[505] I return to this debate in more detail in section 16.3.3 below.

[506] The Skeptics' Forum can be found at http://sguforums.com/index.php [121213]. The thread making fun of Legendarium Reconstructionism is located at http://sguforums.com/ index.php/topic,21216.0.html [121213]. Between 12 July and 11 August 2009 the thread received 607 comments; per 121213 it had been read 25261 times.

call the "gnostic" approach as opposed to the "ritualistic" or "pagan" approach"; in March 2013, Eruannlass took over as captain on the general forum. As Gwineth put it, Ilsaluntë Valion is not so much a "group" or a "path" as an environment in which individuals can pursue their spiritual engagement with the Legendarium in the ways that seem most fit to them. Indeed, that has been the situation for the last five years, but even so, some members continue to harbour a more collectivist ambition. Significantly, at the time of writing (early 2014) members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are planning to reinvigorate the custom of doing collective rituals on Skype, in cooperation between the two groups.

16.1.4. Membership

As already mentioned Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion combined have since 2006 had a core membership of 7-9 people who lead the discussions about the groups' mission, create ritual formats, and so on. Besides this core group, some 10-20 peripheral members have additionally been active at any given time. Let me now supply some more detailed information on the composition of the membership of the two groups. Table 16.1 below shows a breakdown of the core members.

Table 16.1. Legendarium Reconstructionism Core Members			
Period	**Members joining**	**Members leaving**	**# Core members**
Founding members (Summer 2005)	Elwin (US; raised Lutheran; identifies as shaman ǀ mod. 2006-2009) Calantirniel (US; Pagan) Lomion (US; Pagan) Earendil (US; Pagan) Niennildi (US; metaphysical Christian)		5
Pre-schism period (2005-2007)	Lomelindo (US; Heathen) Ellenar (US; Pagan) Llefyn (CA; Pagan)	Lomion	7
Post-schism period (2007-2014)	Gwineth (raised Catholic; IV mod. 2010-2012) Eruannlass (US; Pagan ǀ IV mod. 2013-) Alyras (US; Charismatic and esoteric Christian; joined T-e)	Lomelindo	9

A couple of things are worth pointing out about the core members. First, there have been few changes in the constituency of the core members over the years. Most of those who helped found and shape Tië eldaliéva in 2005-2006 are still active. The three core members who joined after the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off have been fully integrated. Gwineth and Eruannlass have each taken a turn as main moderator ('captain') on the Ilsaluntë Va-

lion forum, and Alyras, who only became a core member of Tië eldaliéva after I had interviewed the members of that group, showed her commitment by generously commenting on a draft of this chapter. It can furthermore be observed that most core members come from North America. Of the eleven core members, nine are American and one Canadian. When they joined, three core members were in their late 20s, four were in their late 30s, and two were in their early 40s, and one in her mid-50s. (I do not know the age for one of the core members, but expect him to have been in his 40s when joining). We almost have a gender balance, with five of the core members being female and four male.

The total number of peripheral members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion combined has always been in the 10-20 range, but since most of these members have left after some time, the number of people who have been peripheral members at some point is much larger. The Tië eldaliéva forum (active 2006-2007) had a total of 59 registered members per 14 July 2007 of which 27 took at least some part in the discussions. From 2008 through 2014, Ilsaluntë Valion, which has had a stricter procedure for admitting new members, has welcomed 33 peripheral members of whom five are currently active on the forum.

Table 16.2. Legendarium Reconstructionism Member Profiles													
	Gender			Nationality				Age when joining					
	Male	Fe-male	N/A	North American	Other English-speaking	Other	N/A	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	N/A
Core members (T-e + IV)	5	6	–	10	–	1	–	–	3	4	2	1	1
Periphery members (IV)	13	18	2	14	4	8	7	5	8	–	5	2	13

The gender, age, and nationality patterns of the peripheral members differ interestingly from those of the core members. The greatest difference is in age profile. Of the 20 peripheral members of whom I know the age at joining, five were in their teens and an additional eight were in their (mostly early) twenties. Many of these young members joined in order to learn from more senior members. Among the peripheral members were also five individuals in their 40s and two in their 50s. None of the young joiners had social ties with other members prior to joining, but some of the middle-aged joiners were friends of the core members and had been invited to join. The gender profile of the peripheral members roughly mirrors that of the core members. In total, out of the 31 members I have data on, 18 were female and 13 male. The preponderance of females is partly due to an overrepresentation of women among the young members. Overall, while most members of Ilsaluntë Valion are women, the female overrepresentation in the

group (58%) is much smaller than in for instance Neo-Paganism in general (72%; cf. Berger 2012, 5). The peripheral members stem from a large number of countries. Besides twelve Americans and two Canadians, Ilsaluntë Valion has (had) peripheral members from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (each 3), and from Australia, Israel, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Ukraine (each 1). It is my impression that most members, both core members and peripheral members, are/were highly educated (or are currently following higher education programmes) though I have no systematic data to back up that hunch. Table 16.2 gives an overview of the member profiles.

16.2. Rituals and Ritual Blending in Legendarium Reconstructionism

The rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are both similar to and different from the rituals of the other groups discussed in this dissertation so far. On the one hand, the rituals of the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups, like all other rituals in the spiritual Tolkien milieu, are fundamentally based on ritual formats from the ceremonial magic tradition. The rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion to some extent appear as the incorporation of Tolkien material into a ceremonial magical format akin to that of Wiccan circle-casting rituals. This is only half the story, however. Legendarium Reconstructionist rituals differ from all other rituals in the spiritual Tolkien milieu because the ceremonial magical rites that make up these rituals have themselves been transformed and adapted to Tolkien's literary mythology. In some cases, original rites have even been substituted by new rites based on the Legendarium. Where Middle-earth Pagans, for example, use a standard Wiccan ritual to call upon characters from *LR*, Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion have devised their own Legendarium-based rites for preparing the magical space and based other rites on revelations from the Valar.

16.2.1. Rituals in Tië Eldaliéva: Inward Acculturation and Belief Elaboration

Tië eldaliéva was launched with a "birthing ritual" held over the phone on 23 August 2005. In crafting the ritual, Lomion and Calantirniel had drawn inspiration from Wiccan rituals and from the Fifth Way Mystery School's High Elvish Working (cf. ch. 13), but constructed a ritual aligned more closely to the Legendarium. Over the next year or so, a standard Tië eldaliéva ritual gradually emerged, and the group created a total of twenty-one ritual formats, one for each solar and lunar observance in their ritual calendar (to which I return below). From August 2006 onwards, these rituals were carried out by about four to seven people over the phone and later on Skype. After the schism in late 2007, members of Tië eldaliéva continued to do rituals together, but from 2009 it gradually became normal practice to do the rituals individually. Table 16.3 below gives a synoptic overview of the phases of an average Tië eldaliéva ritual, compared to a stan-

dard Wiccan circle-casting ritual, to the High Elvish Working of the Fifth Way Mystery School, and to an Ilsaluntë Valion ritual (as they were developed after the schism).[507]

Table 16.3. A Synoptic Overview of the Structure of Legendarium Reconstructionist Rituals				
	High Elvish Valar Working (1993)	**Wiccan Standard Ritual**	**Tië eldaliéva Ritual (2007)**	**Ilsaluntë Valion Ritual (2009)**
Separation phase		1. Preparation of food		1. Preparation of altar and food
	1. No Form, breathing, Oms			
	2. Meta-programming protocol (Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, Cross of the Elements, Middle Pillar, Caduceus)	2. Drawing the circle	1. Song of the Starflower 2. Draw Septagram in the air to seal energy	2. Song of the Starflower (or Blessing Circle Dance)
	3. Elvish Supreme Invoking Ritual of the Pentagram	3. Calling the Quarters	3. Acknowledgement of the directions and evocation of the Valar 4. Reading from TLM	3. Awareness of Arda as Sacred Sphere 4. Reading from TLM
	4. Rending of the Veil/Hymn to Elbereth			
	5. Calling the Lords of the Valar	4. Calling the Goddess (Drawing Down the Moon/ Charge of the Goddess) or calling of other deity/deities	5. Drinking starflower-infused water 6. Visualisation of Oneness with Arda	5. Intonation of Valarin name
Liminal phase				6. Communication with Lunar Radiance
	6. Silent Communion with the Valar	5. Communication with deities; other magical work	7. Individual Otherworld experience, including direct communication with one or more of the Valar; initiated by reading / guide is thanked	7. Individual Otherworld experience; initiated by reading / guide is thanked

			8. The flower of Telperion is thanked
Reinte- gration phase	7. Closing/Hymn to Elbereth	6. Banishing the circle 7. Cakes and wine ceremony	8. Returning awareness to physical space 9. Opening the circle	9. Returning awareness to physical space 10. The blessed food is eaten

TLM = Tolkien's Literary Mythology.

In their basic structure, the rituals of Tië eldaliéva follow the Wiccan standard ritual with (a) a *separation phase* in which a sacred space is created by casting a circle and calling the quarters, (b) a *liminal phase* in which contact with the Goddess or other deities is established and experienced, and (c) a *reintegration phase* in which the deities and the spirits of the quarters are thanked and the circle is opened.[508] Tië eldaliéva modified this format in three significant ways, however, to produce a ritual more aligned with Tolkien's Legendarium.

First, the pentagram ritual, which Wiccans and other ceremonial magicians use to prepare a space for magical work, was developed into a septagram ritual. This was done because the Tië eldaliéva members felt that seven was the sacred number in Tolkien's literary mythology, but the choice probably also reflected that the septagram is a popular symbol in the broader Elven movement.[509] The septagram ritual was named Lindë Elenlótë (Qu: The Song of the Starflower).[510] The Lindë Elenlótë goes:

> a. Touch forehead, intone MEN-EL [Qu: Heavens]
> b. Point down, covering groin, intone AR-DA [Qu: Earth]

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[508] The notions of separation phase, liminal phase, and reintegration phase are indebted to Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Jens Peter Schjødt. Van Gennep (1909) originally observed that initiation rituals have three phases, consisting each of what he called separation rites, margin rites, and aggregation rites. Turner (1964; 1969) subsequently argued that this tripartite structure can be found in all rituals, not only in initiation rituals. Turner also emphasised the transformative character of rituals, arguing that rituals (in contrast to ceremonies) are always intended to transform an initial situation into something else (e.g. boyhood into adulthood, sickness into health). For this reason, Schjødt (1992, 11) has argued that Turner actually operates with five ritual phases, which Schjødt refers to as the initial phase, the separation phase, the liminal phase, the reintegration phase, and the final phase (1992, 11). The rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion aim at some combination of empowerment and gnosis and can therefore be considered transformative, though only moderately so.

[509] Tolkien nowhere explicitly said that "seven was the sacred number of the Elves", but Tië eldaliéva observed that there are seven pairs of Valar and seven stars in the Valacirca (The Great Bear), the most important constellation in the Legendarium. The Silver Elves (1986) introduced the septagram, or the "Seven-Pointed Star" or the "Elven Star of the Seven Sisters", as an Elven symbol and it later became the main symbol for all Elves and Otherkin (Lupa 2007, 52-53).

[510] The Starflower was chosen as a symbol because of its association with the stars – and thus with the Elves – and because it has seven petals.

c. Touch right shoulder, intone VA-LAR

d. Touch left hip, intone E-LE-NIL-LOR [Qu: Stars]

e. Touch left shoulder, intone TEL-PER-I-ON [The older of the two trees]

f. Touch right hip, intone LAUR-E-LIN [The younger of the two trees; Qu: Song of Gold]

g. Fold hands at chest level, intone E-A [Qu: Let it be]

The seven gestures made while intoning do not add up to drawing a septagram, but a septagram is drawn in the air afterwards to seal the energy.

Second, the Wiccan Calling of the Quarters was transformed into a seven-phased evocation of the Valar.[511] This meant adding two directions, Above and Below, to the five ordinary directions, East, South, West, North, and Within. Gestures and intonations in Quenya were crafted for all seven directions. The 14 Valar were sorted into pairs, six pairs of husband and wife and a seventh pair made up of the two 'single' Valar, Ulmo and Nienna. The Valar pairs were coupled to the seven directions and a number of 'key words' were attached to them as shown in table 16.4 below. For the same reason, the Valar were only aligned with directions and elements, but not, for example, with particular crystals, planets, or with the gods of other pantheons.[512]

Table 16.4. Tië Eldaliéva Directions and Key Words		
Direction	**Valar Lords**	**Valar Ladies**
East (*Rómen*)	Manwë AIR, Mind, Clear Sight, Authority, Poetry, Truth	Varda Star energy, Transformation, Divine Love

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[511] The members of Tië eldaliéva stressed that they *evoke* the Valar, but do not *invoke* them. As they formulated the difference between these terms in the interview on Eclectic Pagan Podcast, evocation refers to the calling forth of energies to be present within one's sacred space, while invocation refers to the channelling of the souls or spirits of these energies into one's own body. The distinction between evocation as "calling forth" and invocation as "calling in" goes back to Crowley (1929a, 15).

[512] I give only some of the key words. Correspondences between Valar and the four elements are given in capitals. The associations of the three main Valar, Manwë, Aulë, and Ulmo, with Air, Earth, and Water flows logically from the Legendarium (cf. section 15.2.2 above). The element Fire, left vacant by Melkor's Fall, is here relegated to Tulkas. Departing from the standard elemental associations in Wicca, Tië eldaliéva associated Water with the direction 'Below' rather than with West. That is because, according to the cosmology of the Legendarium, the flat Earth flows on the great ocean Vai which is thus below the Earth (cf. section 15.2.3 above). The Valar pairs were taken to correlate further with seven of the Elven Cirth (Si: Runes). Later the Cirth runes were replaced by letters of the Tengwar, another of Tolkien's scripts and the one most often used for writing in Quenya. The different associations were established through a diligent reading of Tolkien's literary mythology and through the occasional use of trancework. This was mainly the work of Elwin, with the assistance of Calantirniel and Ellenar. Members of Tië eldaliéva hope to develop a more encompassing system of correspondences in the future, including also planets and herbs, and comparing the Valar to the gods and goddesses of other pantheons.

South (*Hyarmen*)	Tulkas FIRE, Protection, Warmth, Justice, Strength	Nessa Animals, Dance, Light-heartedness, Activity
North (*Formen*)	Aulë EARTH, Craftsmanship, Foundation, Endurance	Yavanna Mother Earth, Trees, Fruitfulness, Abundance
Within (*Mi*)	Oromë Nature, Instinct, Guardianship, Male Sexuality	Vána Flowers, Spring, New Growth, Youth, Beauty
Above (*Or*)	Lórien Dreams, Visions, Hope, Goals, Desires	Estë Healing, Rest, Gentleness, Comfort
Below (*Undo*)	Ulmo WATER, Music, Song, Renewal, Creativity, Force	Nienna Pity, Compassion, Humility, Purification
West (*Númen*)	Mandos Death, Judgment, Prophecy, Fate	Vairë Weaving, Experience, Fate

In ritual, the directions are called and the Valar evoked in the order given here, so that ritualists end up facing West, towards the Blessed Realm. The Valar pairs are each addressed with a short greeting. In the Skype ritual which was hosted for me in September 2009, Manwë and Varda were for example called upon with the words: "We now call on Manwë Sulimo, High King of Arda, of the Eagles and Winds … and his Lady, Varda Elentári, Queen of the Stars and protector of Arda and Ilúvatar's Children [Elves and humans]. We welcome you into our circle. Aiya!" The final expression, Aiya, is Quenya for "Hail" and all Valar were welcomed with this greeting. At the end of the ritual, the Valar are thanked for "being with us in circle and for [helping] carrying out in Spirit our work done here tonight, and hereby open ourselves to you even outside this circle." This thanksgiving is concluded with the exclamation "Laita!" (Qu: Praise).[513] After calling the

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[513] Tolkien uses the term Aiya twice in *LR* when Frodo and Sam wield the phial of Eärendil (*LR* 720, 915). By contrast, Laita is used in Tolkien's works only in compounds, such as the Erulaitalë (Qu: Praise to Eru), one of the great Númenórean festivals (*UT* 214). 'Laita' is never used as a greeting. The use of Aiya and Laita as greetings is a loan from a Tolkien-inspired ritual published by Sandra Kynes in *A Year of Ritual* (2004, 181-189). Here, Aiya is used to welcome evoked spirits and Laita as a farewell greeting. Kynes gives the alternative translation "bless" for Laita instead of "praise" (2004, 220), which suggests that she perceived Laita as a translation of the Wiccan farewell greeting "blessed be". In general, Kynes' ritual is plainly structured with (a) circle-casting, (b) calling of the quarters, (c) a reading from Tolkien's works, and (d) the opening of the circle. She has adapted the calling of the quarters somewhat to the Legendarium, using six directions and calling upon the Dwarves, the Elves, the Hobbits, the Vanyar (an Elven people), and the Lord and Lady of All [the God and the Goddess] in the guise of Laurelin and Silpion [Telperion], the Two Trees. The evocation of the God and the Goddess, together with other elements. such as the final greeting "Merry meet, merry part, and merry meet again", give the ritual a strongly Wiccan feel, more so than Tië eldaliéva's ritual.

seven pairs of the Valar, an eighth sub-phase follows in which the participants' Oneness with Eä and Ilúvatar is acknowledged after intoning ILÚVË (Qu: The All).[514] It is perhaps not surprising that the ritual includes a reference to Eru Ilúvatar, as Ilúvatar is the supreme deity in Tolkien's literary mythology, but the pantheistic interpretation of Eru as The All is foreign to the Legendarium. In Tolkien's texts, the distance between Eru and his creation is stressed rather than dissolved.[515]

The third way in which Tië eldaliéva adapted the Wiccan ritual format to the Legendarium was by including a Tolkien-based visualisation sequence. After drinking water infused by starflower essence, the visualisation proceeds in three steps.[516] First, in a variation of the Middle Pillar exercise, the ritualists visualise themselves circulating the silver light of Telperion and the golden light of Laurelin through their chakras, and after that visualise themselves being one with Arda. This step constitutes the last of the separation rites and establishes a connection with the Blessed Realm. In the second step of the sequence, the ritualists visualise themselves as being *within* the Blessed Realm. A short text, which is different in every ritual, is read aloud, describing a particular scene and perhaps introducing one of the Valar as a guide. Then follows 5-20 minutes of silent meditation in which the vision is allowed to unfold. The third step is a twin of the first and represents the return to the physical world. The participants are now back at Corollairë, the Mound of the Two Trees, and visualise that they detach themselves from the Oneness with Arda and slow down the circulation of light/energy from the Two Trees. A bit of the "healing energy" from the Two Trees is brought back and the ritualists visualise carrying it in their pocket, ready for use when needed.[517]

The final and fourth way in which Tië eldaliéva adapted their ritual to the Legendarium concerns the ritual calendar used rather than the content of the ritual. Tolkien nowhere provides a full description of the Elven ritual calendar, but he gives enough information for such a calendar to be constructed. Elwin did this for Tië eldaliéva. He took the information on the six solar seasons and the new-year and mid-year festivals from the *LR* appendix on calendars (cf. footnote 197 above) and the scattered information on Elven festivals given in *LT* (cf. footnote 446 above) and fitted seasons and festivals with each other so as to have one festival at each seasonal transition and at each solstice. A Cuivérë Quendiva holiday celebrating the Elves' awakening was improvised by Tië elda-

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[514] If Christians are participating, the Christ Consciousness is called into the circle as well.

[515] I return to the pantheistic conception of Eru in section 16.3.2 below.

[516] Calantirniel, who is a professional flower essence practitioner, got the idea of using starflower essence. The point is that since the Quendi are the People of the Stars, starflower essence resonates with Quendi and one can appreciate one's Elvishness or Elven connection by consuming it.

[517] Perhaps the idea of carrying healing energy back from the Blessed Realm was inspired by Vivienne O'Regan's pathworking ritual "The Voyage West". Concluding this ritual, healing energy is channeled from the Blessed Realm into Middle-earth (Knight 1990, 147; 2001, 67).

liéva, and the entire calendar was fixed to the Gregorian system.[518] In table 16.5 below, I list both Tië eldaliéva's solar and lunar observations. Tolkien's texts include no moon calendar, but Tië eldaliéva has given Quenyan names to the thirteen moons of the year and dedicated most of them to one of the Valar. These Moon celebrations were inspired by Wicca and provides a series of Elven 'Esbats' to supplement the Elven solar festivals supplanting the Wiccan Sabbats (Equinoxes, Solstices, and Cross-quarter Days). The dates for the moons differ each year; those given are the Full Moon dates for the Elven year 2012-2013. Ilsaluntë Valion changed some details in the calendar, especially concerning the Valar (or Maiar) to whom the various holidays are dedicated. These changes are given in sharp brackets.

Table 16.5. Ritual Calendar of Tië Eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion	
Solar observations	**Lunar observations**
March 28. Vinya Loa (New Year; *Vairë*). Beginning of Spring (Tuilë).	
	Isilvíressë (Moon of Youth; *Tulkas [Vána]*). April 6.
	Isillótessë (Moon of Flowers; *Nessa*). May 6.
May 21. Nost-na-Lothion (Birth of Flowers; *Vána [Ilmarë]*). Beginning of Summer (Lairë).	
	Isilnárië (Moon of Bright Fire; *Varda*). June 4.
June 21. Tarnin Austa (Gates of Summer; *The Sun [Melian]*). Solstice.	
	Isilcermië (Moon of the First Harvest; *Irmo*). July 3.
August 1. Yávië (Autumn; *Arda [Olórin]*). Beginning of Autumn (Yávië).	
	Isilúrimë (Moon of Heat; *Ainur [Aulë]*). August 2.
	Isilyavannië (Moon of Yavanna; *Yavanna*). August 31.
September 25-27. Enderi (Middle-days; *Oromë [Ossë]*). Beginning of Fading (Quellë).	
	Isilnarquelië (Moon of the Fiery Fading; *Mandos [Oromë]*). September 30.
	Isilhísimë (Moon of Mists; *Estë*). October 29.
November 21. Cuivérë Quendiva (Awakening of the Quendi; *the Elves*). Beginning of Winter (Hrívë).	
	Isilringarë (Moon of Frosty Cold; *Mourning Morgoth's Mark on Arda [Nienna]*). November 28.
December 21. Turuhalmë (The Logdrawing; *The Moon [Tulkas]*). Solstice.	
	Isilnarvinyë (Moon of the New Fire; *Aulë [Mandos]*). December 28.
	Isilnénimë (Moon of Waters; *Ulmo*). January 27.

[518] Two of the feasts, Yávië and Sovalwaris, have only scant foundation in Tolkien's texts. Yávië normally refers to the autumn season rather than to a festival at its beginning. Sovalwaris is a term used for the month February. Its use as a name for a festival is based on the occurrence of the capitalised noun *i Sovallë* (Qe: the Purification) in a very early wordlist of Tolkien's, the "Qenya Lexicon" (Tolkien 1998b).

| February 1. Sovalwaris (February; *Nienna [Uinen]*). Beginning of 'Stirring' (Coirë). |
| Isilsúlimë (Moon of the Breezes; *Manwë*). February 25. |
| Isilmaiaron (Moon of the Maiar; *Maiar*) [IV doubles Isilsúlimë if 13th moon needed]. March 27. |

To sum up, two different logics or processes were at work in the development of Tië eldaliéva's rituals. The first of these logics was *inward acculturation*, i.e. the assimilation of elements from other traditions into one's own tradition through adaptation and naturalisation. Through inward acculturation the group adapted the Wiccan circle-casting ritual to the Legendarium by (1) transforming the pentagram ritual into a septagram ritual and the Calling of the Quarters into a seven-phased evocation of the Valar, by (2) reworking of the Middle Pillar exercise into a visualisation of light energies from the Two Trees, and by (3) adopting the notion that one can raise healing energy in ritual and bring it back into the world. In the first case, the effect of acculturation was achieved by explicitly transforming the original five-phased rites into new, seven-phased Elven rites; in the two later cases acculturation was achieved implicitly by letting practices and beliefs from the ceremonial magic pass as natural elements of a Legendarium-based ritual. The second logic is what I call *belief elaboration*, i.e. systematisation of Legendarium lore and invention of new elements according to the inner logic of Tolkien's literary mythology. Belief elaboration was at work in (1) the fixing of key words, elements, and directions to the Valar on basis of trancework and research of Tolkien's texts and in (2) the construction of the Elven ritual calendar.

In 2007, the content of Tië eldaliéva's rituals became a source of tension. Members disagreed on whether the ceremonial magical rites that made up the standard ritual had been sufficiently acculturated. One group, led by Calantirniel, found that the rituals were sufficiently Legendarium-aligned. The other group, led by Elwin, was disturbed by the continued reference to circle-casting, chakras, and Hindu mudras. For this group, the Tië eldaliéva ritual ultimately felt too foreign and 'Pagan'. As mentioned in section 16.1.2 above, this disagreement was one of the main reasons for the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off. Consequently, one of the first things to happen after the hive-off was that the members of Ilsaluntë Valion constructed a new and more purist ritual format.

16.2.2. Rituals in Ilsaluntë Valion: Continued Acculturation and Belief Elaboration

A new Ilsaluntë Valion core ritual and a range of specific rituals for the various solar and lunar observances were created by reworking the Tië eldaliéva originals. The core ritual was changed by assimilating Wiccan elements more thoroughly (continued inward acculturation) or by substituting elements that could not be acculturated with Legendarium-inspired rites of the group's own invention (continued belief elaboration). The ritual calendar was modified a bit as well, so that a number of holidays became aligned with a

different Valar or Maia. Also, Ilsaluntë Valion does not observe a thirteenth moon, Isilmaiaron, but doubles Isilsúlimë if a thirteenth moon is needed (cf. table 16.5 above).
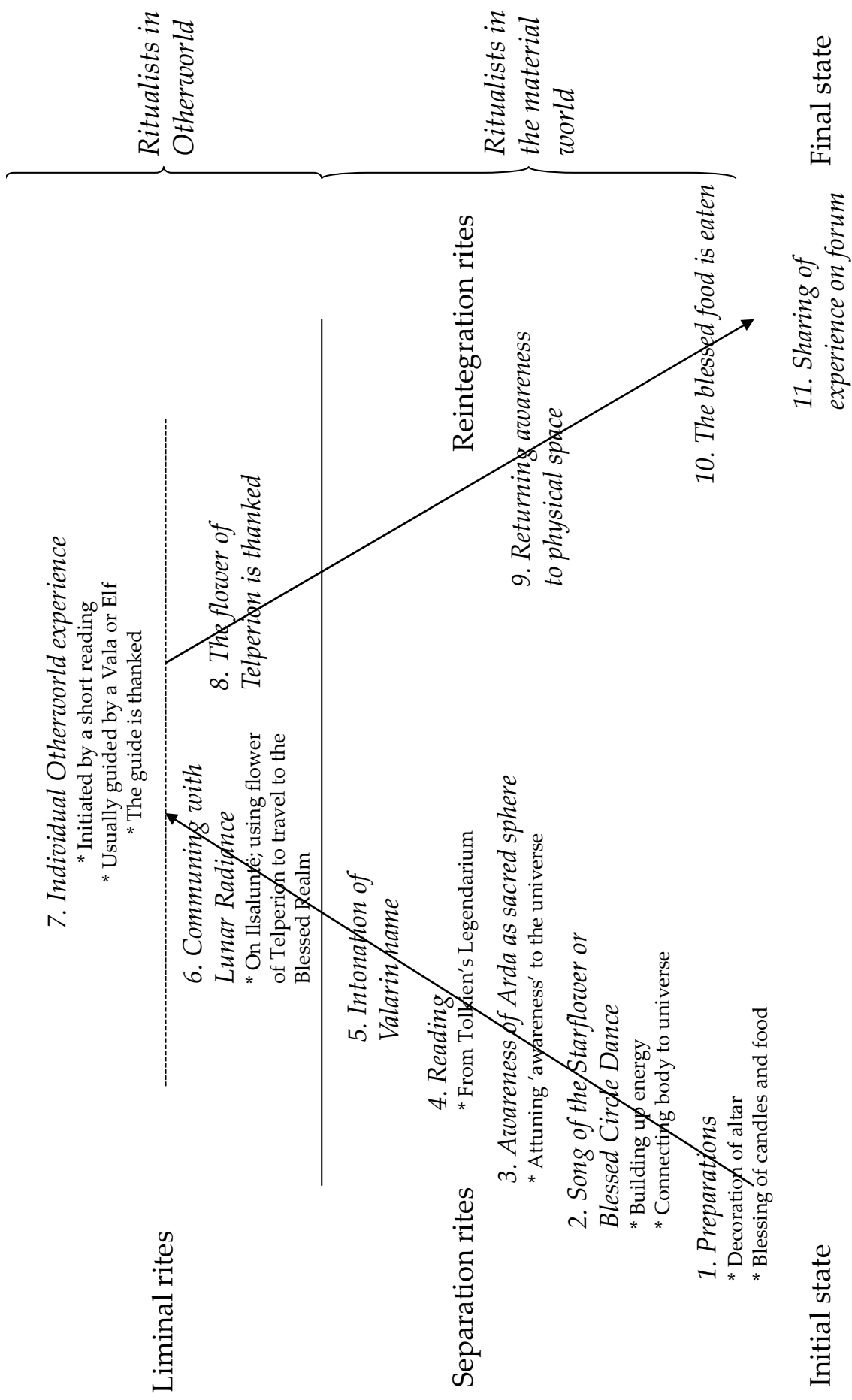
Ellenar, Elwin, and Niennildi, together with various occasional joiners, performed the new rituals together over the phone until mid-autumn of 2008, when they had produced ritual formats for a full year. Other members used these formats for individual rituals. In the spring of 2009, Eruannlass took over the responsibility of further developing the rituals and distributing them in advance of the approaching holiday or full moon.[519] These are the rituals which are presented to new members as the official rituals of the group. Though the practice of doing the rituals collectively over the phone or on Skype has never been revived, most members of Ilsaluntë Valion continue to use the group's formats for individual rituals. The practice is no longer standardised, however, as some members use Eruannlass' 'third-generation' formats, while Elwin and Niennildi continue to use the 'second-generation' rituals developed in 2008, and still other members have a freer approach. An overview of an 'official' Ilsaluntë Valion lunar observation as they have looked since 2009 is given in figure 16.1 below.

The preparation phase of the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual represents an addition to the Tië eldaliéva ritual analysed above. In this phase one's home altar is decorated in accordance with the Vala to whom the observance is oriented (e.g. metal for Aulë; flowers for Yavanna). Furthermore, candles are lit and a blessing sign made over a selection of seasonal food and drinks to be consumed later. According to the members, this special blessing sign had been taught to Ellenar by the Valar in a meditation. The rest of the separation rites are transformations or substitutions of rites from the Tië eldaliéva ritual. To raise energy, members either use a new version of the Song of the Starflower modified by Eruannlass, or the alternative "Blessed Circle Dance" written by Niennildi.[520] The Blessed Circle Dance involves gestures and intonations just like the Lindë Elenlótë, but is experienced by some members as more true to the Legendarium because it is not directly based on the pentagram ritual. Furthermore, reflecting the more Mannish perspective of Ilsaluntë Valion, references to "Elven DNA" and the drinking of Starflower-infused water have been abandoned. In the phase that follows ritualists visualise Arda as a sacred sphere, focusing in turn on the three Airs (Vilna, Ilwë, and Vaitya), the Great Sea (Vai), and the Earth. Contrary to the Arda visualisation of the Tië eldaliéva ritual, the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual no longer has any circulation of energy via the chakras. Indeed, just as the Blessed Circle Dance has been designed as a Legendarium-true substitute for the pentagram ritual-based Lindë Elenlótë, the new 'Awareness of Arda as Sacred Sphere'-rite has been crafted as a Legendarium-true alternative for the Middle Pillar-inspired visualisation of oneness with Arda. The Sacred Sphere phase creates a sense of beginning the meditative journey, but not more so than awareness can return to the here and now for the

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[519] According to Eruannlass, her Elven spirit companion Rowan assisted with all her ritual compositions (280710). Occasionally, Rowan is listed as author of certain passages.

[520] The Ilsaluntë Valion version of the Lindë Elenlótë uses eight as a sacred number instead of seven.

Figure 16.1. An Ilsaluntë Valion Lunar Observation

Ritualists in Otherworld

Ritualists in the material world

Final state

Liminal rites

Separation rites

Reintegration rites

Initial state

7. *Individual Otherworld experience*
  * Initiated by a short reading
  * Usually guided by a Vala or Elf
  * The guide is thanked

6. *Communing with Lunar Radiance*
  * On Ilsaluntë; using flower of Telperion to travel to the Blessed Realm

8. *The flower of Telperion is thanked*

9. *Returning awareness to physical space*

10. *The blessed food is eaten*

11. *Sharing of experience on forum*

5. *Intonation of Valarin name*

4. *Reading*
  * From Tolkien's Legendarium

3. *Awareness of Arda as sacred sphere*
  * Attuning 'awareness' to the universe

2. *Song of the Starflower or Blessed Circle Dance*
  * Building up energy
  * Connecting body to universe

1. *Preparations*
  * Decoration of altar
  * Blessing of candles and food

following two phases of the ritual, a reading from Tolkien's literary mythology (phase 4) and the intonation of the Valarin name of the Vala on whom the ritual is focused (phase 5).[521] The intonation of the Valarin name can be seen as a very condensed substitute for the evocation of the 14 Valar in the original Tië eldaliéva ritual. Not only does this change eliminate the most important ceremonial rite in the original ritual, it also includes an element of belief elaboration. According to the members, several of the Valarin names which are intoned in this phase have been discovered by Lomelindo, in trance. These names supplement the few names of the Valar in Valarin provided by Tolkien (cf. table 15.2 above).

Whereas the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual compresses the ceremonial separation rites to a bare minimum, it expands the liminal phase by doubling the ritual structure of separation-liminality-reintegration *within* the liminal phase itself. This has been done to create a feeling of actively journeying to the Blessed Realm. The first liminal rite, phase 6 of the whole ritual, is referred to as "Communing with Lunar Radiance".[522] In this phase, ritualists visualise themselves as standing on the Moon and looking at the flower of Telperion, which according to Tolkien's mythology is the light-source of the Moon. Eruannlass and Gwineth explained that some things exist *both* in the physical world *and* in the Blessed Realm, and because the Moon is such a thing, one can transport oneself from the physical world to the Blessed Realm by visualising the Moon. This is done by first visualising the Moon as it looks in the physical world and thereafter visualising it as it is described in Tolkien's mythology. Like in the Tië eldaliéva ritual, the liminal culmination is a visualisation of the Blessed Realm (phase 7). Little is changed here. A passage sets the scene for the meditation, usually opening with a sentence such as "When the time is right, you find yourself in a forest/dale/…". Usually a guide appears and a scene unfolds or messages are conveyed. The journey back to the physical world again goes via the Moon (phase 8) where the flower of Telperion is thanked for helping establish connection with the Blessed Realm.

In broad terms, Ilsaluntë Valion transformed Tië eldaliéva's ceremonial magical evocation of the Valar into something more reminiscent of a shamanic journey to the Blessed Realm. Most explicit and implicit references to Legendarium-foreign concepts (mudras, chakras) and rites (pentagram rituals, Middle Pillar) were purged, though the main function of the ritual remained the same, viz. to communicate with the denizens of Aman and bring back gnosis in the form of experiences or personal messages.[523] We can

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[521] Most readings are from *HoMe* or *S*. The 32 ritual formats I have from the period April 2008 to October 2010 include a total of 45 reading fragments. Of these, 35 were from *HoMe* or *S*, six from *LR* or *H*, and four from other texts than Tolkien's.

[522] For solar rituals, a parallel visualisation focused on the Sun is used. The Cuivérë Quendiva ritual includes a visualisation passage focused on the stars.

[523] The second function of Tië eldaliéva rituals of bringing back healing energy from Aman has been lost in the Ilsaluntë Valion rituals. That does not mean that Ilsaluntë Valion rituals cannot have as goal to bring about a real transformation in the material world. In fact, some of Ilsaluntë Valion's rituals in 2008 had a

say that the blending mode of the ritual changed, at least in degree. The ritual formats of Tië eldaliéva were characterised by a form of weak inward acculturation in which Legendarium-foreign ritual elements were integrated into a Legendarium frame, but not changed enough to completely assimilate them. The ritual formats of Ilsaluntë Valion, by contrast, were characterised by a strong form of inward acculturation where Legendarium-foreign elements were adapted and assimilated to such a degree that they no longer seemed foreign to the Legendarium. Similarly, the Tië eldaliéva ritual included only occasional instances of tradition-internal belief elaboration; the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual includes many.[524]

Besides observing the lunisolar holidays, many members of Ilsaluntë Valion also engage with the Legendarium in less ritualised ways. It is common to visit the Blessed Realm in simple mediations, and many members report spiritually significant dreams. Meditation experiences and spiritual dreams are shared and discussed in special sections of the forum. Furthermore, some members have experimented with ancestral memory regression inspired by *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers* and/or say that they sometimes receive spontaneous communications from the Valar outside rituals.

16.2.3. Ritual Approaches and Blending Patterns in Legendarium Reconstructionism

From 2009 onwards, it gradually became clear to the members that Ilsaluntë Valion comprised two groups of members who have a different outlook on how to approach the Legendarium ritually. One group uses the Ilsaluntë Valion ritual formats regularly and more or less literally and considers these rituals to be the very core of what Ilsaluntë Valion is about. The members of the other group may or may not use the rituals, but do

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more magical, transformative character than had been the standard in Tië eldaliéva, using visualisations and affirmations to attract success, money, and good health.

[524] In a preliminary analysis of the spiritual Tolkien milieu, I used the terms "narrative framing" and "reconstructionism" (Davidsen 2012a, 194-197) to refer to what I now describe as positions of weak acculturation or strong acculturation combined with belief elaboration. I defined the "narrative framing approach" as using "the Legendarium as a hermeneutic key or religious perception filter through which [members] interpret other religious traditions" (Davidsen 2012a, 195). I now find my old terminology problematic for two reasons. To begin with, not only the "narrative framing" (or weakly acculturating) approach takes Tolkien's literary mythology as its narrative frame; the "reconstructionist" (or strongly acculturating) does so even more. At the same time, any narrative framing approach is by definition reconstructionist in nature, at least in the basic meaning of being focused on a particular narrative corpus. It is therefore quite confusing to contrast a reconstructionist position to a narrative framing position. The second problem is that I described Middle-earth Pagans as having a narrative framing approach. I now think my definition of the narrative framing approach fits the blending mode of Tië eldaliéva very well, but that it is no accurate description of the blending mode of Middle-earth Pagans. As I have argued in chapter 14, Middle-earth Pagans do not use the Legendarium as a hermeneutic key through which they interpret other religious traditions, but rather use *other* religious traditions as hermeneutic keys through which they interpret the Legendarium.

not see them as the core of Ilsaluntë Valion's practice. Instead, they have come to focus primarily or exclusively on simpler, individual meditations. Though this second group had used the fixed formats in the past, they increasingly felt that they were no longer necessary to facilitate that which was really important, namely the gnostic exploration of the Blessed Realm in meditation. That is to say, a third ritual approach had emerged in Legendarium Reconstructionism besides the formal Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion approaches analysed in the two sub-sections above. I have summed up the three modes of Legendarium Reconstructionism in table 16.6 below.[525]

Table 16.6. Three Modes of Legendarium Reconstructionism		
Mode	T-e Ceremonial Mode *(2005 onwards)*	IV Ceremonial Mode *(2008 onwards)*	IV Gnostic Mode *(2009 onwards)*
Preferred rituals	Tië eldaliéva rituals	Ilsaluntë Valion rituals	*Ad hoc* meditations
Group purpose	Codification of beliefs and rituals into a tradition	Codification of beliefs and rituals into a tradition	Attainment of individual gnosis
Blending style	Weak acculturation of Legendarium-foreign rites *(Explicitly Pagan)*	Strong acculturation of Legendarium-foreign rites *(Implicitly Pagan)*	No acceptance of Legendarium-foreign rites *(Explicitly non-Pagan)*
Core members (2014)	Calantirniel, Llefyn, Alyras	Ellenar, Eruannlass	Elwin, Gwineth, Niennildi
Core members (past)	Lomion, Ellenar, Elwin, Niennildi, Earendil	Elwin, Niennildi, Gwineth	

Each ritual approach correlates with different ideas about the very purpose of Legendarium Reconstructionism. A preference for fixed, ceremonial rituals, either of the Tië eldaliéva or the Ilsaluntë Valion type, goes together with the conviction that the ultimate purpose of Legendarium Reconstructionism is collective tradition-building. By contrast, those Ilsaluntë Valion members who have come to prefer individual, unscheduled meditations no longer have tradition-building as their aim. These members rather consider individual experience to be the purpose of their spiritual practice. The different ritual preferences also correlate with different attitudes on religious blending, ranging from wide openness to the use of Pagan and ceremonial magical elements in ritual to the rejection of all non-Tolkienesque ritual elements. Not surprisingly, most of those who

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[525] Of the core members, Lomelindo does not figure in the overview. Lomelindo never used the reconstructed Elven ritual calendar. He claimed to observe the three Númenórean festivals (cf. footnote 446). Earendil is a core member of Tië eldaliéva, but does not perform rituals regularly and only participated in a few of the collective rituals on Skype in the early days of the group.

use Pagan rituals also self-identify as Pagans, while the 'gnostic explorers' in Ilsaluntë Valion all have a non-Pagan background.

16.3. Rationalisation and Justification in Legendarium Reconstructionism

In the previous section, I emphasised that the rituals of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion have been a cause of debate and division, but that is only half the story. It is just as important to stress that the groups' ritual formats were the result of a collaborative effort and that they express two first-order beliefs that all members share. These beliefs are (1) that Tolkien's literary mythology refers to real supernatural beings, namely the Valar, the Maiar, and the Quendi, and (2) that these beings dwell in a world that is different from the physical world, but which can be accessed in ritual. These two core beliefs, together with the rituals in which they are expressed, and the experiences which those rituals generate, comprise the elemental religious core of Legendarium Reconstructionism.

The elemental religion of Legendarium Reconstructionism has a superstructure of rationalised religion, comprising theories about the precise ontological nature of Tolkien's supernatural beings and their otherworldly abode, and about the epistemological status of the experiences one can have of them. These theories defend the legitimacy of elemental religious practice based on Tolkien's fiction and explain its significance. In other words, the ontological and epistemological theories comprise a battery of semiotic strategies for the construction and maintenance of plausibility. In the bulk of this section, I chart the repertoire of rationalisation and justification strategies in Legendarium Reconstructionism, looking in turn at (a) theories about the reference authority of Tolkien's literary mythology and the relation between Tolkien's narratives and other mythologies, (b) theories about the ontological nature of the various supernatural beings in Tolkien's literary mythology, and (c) the various epistemological strategies employed in justifying the religious use of Tolkien's mythology. Having explored in detail the rationalised beliefs of Legendarium Reconstructionism, I revisit the four hypotheses on *HoMe*-based religion formulated in chapter 15 and assess whether they have held up.

16.3.1. The Reality of Tolkien's Narrative World: Mytho-historical and Mytho-cosmological Approaches

All the Legendarium Reconstructionists I have talked to emphasise that they consider Tolkien's literary mythology to be a "valid" mythology. This means two things. First, it means that members do not see Tolkien's narratives as mere fiction, but take them to constitute a mythology in their own right. Being a full-fledged mythology, Tolkien's narratives are considered to be *as valid* a textual foundation for religious practice as any other body of myth. By labelling Tolkien's mythology "valid" rather than "true", the

Legendarium Reconstructionists, second, distance themselves from religious literalism. The denouncement of literalism only concerns *absolute* literalism, however, for most Legendarium Reconstructionists believe that Tolkien's narratives provide quite accurate descriptions of the Valar and the Quendi and some believe that they may even have some foundation in historical fact. That Tolkien's literary mythology is merely deemed valid is not to say that Legendarium Reconstructionists consider Tolkien's literary mythology inferior to other mythologies; to the contrary, they consider *all* mythologies to be merely valid rather than absolutely, literally true. In line with this view, they consider Legendarium Reconstructionism a valid spiritual path, but only one valid path among many.

Even so, Legendarium Reconstructionists sometimes make bolder claims about the relation between Tolkien's literary mythology and other mythologies. Indeed, one can distinguish between a weak and a strong claim on this matter. The weak claim is that 'Tolkien's literary mythology is as valid as any other mythology, but superior in its fit to me personally'. The strong claim is this: 'Tolkien's literary mythology is *objectively* more valid, authentic, and 'true' than other mythologies'. Later in this section we will encounter the strong claim in the guise of assertions that Tolkien's account is more historically accurate than the accounts of other myths, and in the claim that the Valar are the archetypal beings revealing themselves in the guise of the gods and goddesses of the world's many pantheons. This view, which approximates an identification of Tolkien's Legendarium with "perennial philosophy", is the binocular approach put upside-down. Now, it is no longer Tolkien's literary mythology which is taken to be a palimpsest of other myths, but the other myths which are considered to be derived from a core which is retained most purely in Tolkien's lore. The presence of the strong claim sets Legendarium Reconstructionism, together with some Tolkien-affirming Elven groups, apart from all the other groups in the spiritual Tolkien milieu for whom Tolkien's literary mythology is ultimately considered either derived from or inferior to other mythologies.

Members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion have developed different theories about how Tolkien's narrative world relates to the actual world. They agree that Tolkien's narratives refer, at least in part, to an independent, non-material reality, and inspired by Henry Corbin they often refer to this reality as "the Imaginal Realm". With references to Islamic esotericism (1969; 1972), Corbin claimed that the Imagination (which he always capitalises) constitutes both a valid source of knowledge and a realm or mode of being, the *Mundus Imaginalis* or the Imaginal Realm. He coined the term "Imaginal", as opposed to "imaginary", to emphasise the reality of the Imaginal as opposed to the non-reality of imagination and fantasy. For Corbin, the Imaginal Realm not only stands in opposition to the material world, but constitutes an intermediary realm between the material world, on the one hand, and the realm of pure Spirit on the other. The notion of the Imaginal Realm has entered the vocabulary of Legendarium Reconstructionism through Stephan Hoeller, who in his lecture on "J.R.R. Tolkien's Gnosis for Our Day" explains that

Tolkien had accessed this realm and that his narratives are based on imaginal experiences.[526] Tolkien himself never spoke of the Imaginal Realm, but in *Smith of Wootton Major* he makes a distinction between World and Faery (cf. section 15.3.1 above). The Legendarium Reconstructionists follow Hoeller in considering Tolkien's distinction between World and Faery synonymous with Corbin's distinction between the material world and the Imaginal Realm.

The Legendarium Reconstructionists see the relation between Tolkien's narrative world and Corbin's esoteric cosmology in one of two different ways, depending on whether they read Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-historical or the mytho-cosmological mode. Those who approach Tolkien's narratives in the mytho-historical mode, and hence consider them to refer in some way to historical events in the actual world, see a close fit between Corbin's three-layered cosmology and the likewise three-layered cosmology of the Legendarium. For this group, Middle-earth, the material world in Tolkien's mythology, can be equated with our physical world. The Blessed Realm, which is the intermediary world in Tolkien's mythology, can furthermore be taken to correspond to the Imaginal Realm. This makes sense, for even though the Blessed Realm is part of the created World within Tolkien's cosmology, it is no longer physically connected to Middle-earth and can only be accessed from Middle-earth via the Olórë Mallë, the Path of Dreams.[527] Another group of members approach Tolkien's literary mythology in the mytho-cosmological mode. These members do not believe that Tolkien's narratives say anything about the history of the physical world, but consider both the Blessed Realm *and* Middle-earth to be situated within the Imaginal Realm, or at least to reflect experiences of this realm. For both groups the notion of the Imaginal Realm serves to explain how the Valar and the Blessed Realm can be real, even though they do not exist in the physical world.

Most Legendarium Reconstructionists more or less share Corbin's emanentist cosmology and pantheist theology and acknowledge that the Imaginal Realm is ultimately an intermediary world between the World of Spirit and the material world. This does not rhyme well with Tolkien's dualistic cosmology and theistic theology, a point I return to in section 16.3.2 below. As a consequence of this, Eru's Timeless Halls outside the Created World cannot be identified outright with Corbin's World of Spirit. This has been no great cause of cognitive friction, however, since the ritual practice of the Legendarium Reconstructionists is focused solely on the Imaginal Realm. Table 16.7 below gives an

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[526] Legendarium Reconstructionists use the notion of the Imaginal Realm to embed Tolkien's narrative world within established esoteric cosmology in the same way as other groups within the spiritual Tolkien milieu have made reference to the astral plane. On Hoeller and the lecture, see footnote 484 above.

[527] In Tolkien's narrative world, the Blessed Realm used to exist on the same plane as Middle-earth, but gradually became separated from this material plane, first through the Hiding of Valinor and later through the Rounding of the World following the destruction of Númenor (cf. section 15.2.3 above).

overview of the mytho-historical and mytho-cosmological rationalisations of Tolkien's narrative cosmology.

Table 16.7. Rationalisations of Tolkien's Narrative Cosmology			
Corbin's esoteric cosmology	**The cosmology in *Smith***	**Tolkien's cosmology in the Middle-earth text corpus**	
		The Mytho-historical fit	*The Mytho-cosmological fit*
The World of Spirit	-----	(The Timeless Halls)	(The Timeless Halls)
The Imaginal Realm	Faery	The Blessed Realm	The Blessed Realm; Middle-earth
The Material World	World	Middle-earth	-----

A few additional points must be made about the relation between the Blessed Realm and the Imaginal Realm. First, the two are usually not simply equated. Most often, the Imaginal Realm is taken to include both the Blessed Realm *and* other other-worlds within it. This view is in accordance with the inclusive theology of religions of Legendarium Reconstructionism: Members not only consider other paths legitimate, but are typically also prepared to grant the deities and otherworlds of other traditions the same ontological status as their own deities and otherworld, by situating them within the Imaginal Realm. Second, some members hold a view that combines elements from the mytho-historical and the mytho-cosmological ones already sketched. Extending Tolkien's notion that the Blessed Realm used to be part of the physical world, these members claim that both the Blessed Realm *and* Middle-earth together constitute a plane of existence that used to be intertwined with our world, but have become detached at some point in history.

Legendarium Reconstructionists rationalise their ritual interaction with Tolkien's narrative world in different ways. Members with a mytho-cosmological approach, for whom Tolkien's entire world is situated within the Imaginal Realm, typically use notions from *beyond* Tolkien's Middle-earth text corpus to rationalise their ritual practice. With Jung they may say that they use the "active imagination" and the "transcendent function" of the psyche to connect with the Imaginal Realm.[528] If they draw on Tolkien, they will invoke *Smith* or *On Fairy-Stories* and consider their own experiences emulations of Tolkien's experiences of Faery.[529] Legendarium Reconstructionists with a mytho-histori-

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[528] Jung-inspired members will not talk about the collective unconscious, however, and if they use the term 'archetype' it will mean 'one of many cosmological powers' rather than 'one of a few psychological basis-structures'.

[529] Several individuals who are not members of Tië eldaliéva or Ilsaluntë Valion share the view that Tolkien had visited Faery and that his narratives reveal this fact. One noteworthy example is James Warren Maertens (aka Alferian Gwydion MacLir), a Druid and freemason who in 2007 held the Mount Haemus Lecture

cal outlook, by contrast, tend to rationalise their ritual practice in the light of the Legendarium itself. For instance, members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion did an experimental ritual together in 2008 in which they visualised themselves travelling to Aman via the Ilweran, the Rainbow Bridge, which connects Middle-earth with the Blessed Realm according to the lore (cf. section 15.2.3 above). The same members will sometimes speak of their dreams and meditation experiences as journeys on the Olórë Mallë, the Path of Dreams. Taking the physical description of the Olórë Mallë in *The Lost Tales* to be metaphorical, they prefer to refer to their various ways of establishing imaginal contact with the Blessed Realm as a repertoire of "*olórmë*" through which one can receive "*olor-messages*". Elwin considers a late essay of Tolkien's, the "Ósanwe-kenta" (Qu: Enquiry into the Communication of Thought), to be the Legendarium core text which best provides a rationalisation of the group's ritual practices from an 'inside the lore'-perspective. This text describes thought-communication between the various beings in Tolkien's world, including thought-communication between Eru, the Valar, and the Quendi on the one hand, and humans on the other. The "Ósanwe-kenta" makes it possible to interpret both the members' meditation experiences, dream visions, and spontaneous revelations from the Valar, as well as Tolkien's dream visions and 'Faery' experiences, as being in fact thought-communication with the Valar (and occasionally with the Quendi or even with Eru).[530]

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on Tolkien and Faery for the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (Maertens 2007). In this text Maertens expresses the conviction that Faery is real and he equates it both with the Otherworld and with Jung's concept of the Anima Mundi (2007, 9, 13). He is furthermore convinced that Tolkien had found a way into this world and that he wrote his tales to help others find the way as well. As Maertens writes, "the Lord of the Rings and the other mythological works of Professor Tolkien have given all of us a doorway into the world of Faerie that is perhaps not fully appreciated even by his fans. Tolkien considered that what he was writing was a "Faerie tale" in the most serious sense of the term" (Maertens 2007, 25). At least one of the Legendarium Reconstructionist core members, Ellenar, found Tië eldaliéva after having studied in Maertens' now defunct Avalon College. Maertens' homepage can be accessed at http://www.bardwood.com [140812]. The Avalon College of Druidry used to be hosted at www.avaloncollege.org. It is no longer online, but the site has been captured numerous times by the Internet Wayback Machine. The site, as it looked per 4 October 2006, can be accessed at http://web.archive.org/web/20061004040548/http://avaloncollege.org/ [070214].

[530] "Ósanwe-kenta" was not included in *HoMe*, but was later published in *Vinyar Tengwar* (Tolkien 1998a). Like the "Note on the Language of the Valar'" discussed in section 15.2.2 above, the "Ósanwe-kenta" is an appendix to *Quendi and Eldar*, and like the "Note", it is framed as a summary of certain passages of Pengoloð's *Lhammas* (cf. footnote 456). The very phenomenon of thought-communication is mentioned in the main text of *Quendi and Eldar*, but only as a form of communication used by the Valar among themselves. "Ósanwe-kenta" makes it clear that thought-communication is the natural form of communication, not only for the Valar and the Maiar, but also for Quendi and Men (Tolkien 1998a, 23). The races differ in their capacity of communicating in this way, however. This is partly because thought-communication, being the communication between two souls (*fëar*), is inhibited by the presence of a body (*hröa*), and partly because the ability to transmit messages via thought depends on the sender's stature and authority (Tolkien 1998a, 23-24). For these reasons, it is much easier for humans to receive thought-messages than to send them.

While all Legendarium Reconstructionists agree that Tolkien had in some way accessed another reality and that his writings can be used as a doorway back into that reality, opinions differ much on whether Tolkien's texts also refer to events in our own world's prehistory. Of the core members, especially Elwin and Lomelindo have been interested in exploring correspondences between the Legendarium and the historical record, and as mentioned in section 16.1.3 above, the mytho-historical approach is prominently stressed in Ilsaluntë Valion's Charter. A cornerstone of the Charter is the belief that some humans, though not all, belong to the Line of Lúthien and hence have some measure of Elven and Maian ancestry. These so-called Edain are further said to possess a special spiritual quality that can manifest itself in different kinds of talents. One such talent is the ability to connect with the Blessed Realm, so it seems that at least the founders of Ilsaluntë Valion considered themselves to be Edain. An ambitious, mytho-historical project in the first years of Ilsaluntë Valion's existence was the "Arda timeline", an attempt, in Elwin's words, to fuse information "from the Lore and archeo-astronomy and geological and paleontological information". Elwin told me that Tolkien's estimate in a letter (*Letters* 283) that *LR* took place 6000 years ago was just a guess and that the events in his narratives better fit the historical evidence if placed much further back in time.

16.3.2. The Ontology of Tolkien's Supernatural Beings: Affirmative and Transformative Approaches

While all Legendarium Reconstructionists feel that the supernatural beings in Tolkien's narratives refer to real supernatural entities, they sometime disagree on whether these beings exist simply in the way Tolkien describes them (literal affirmation) or whether his description has in some way been distorted and is therefore in need of restoration (theistic or dynamistic transformation). Members disagree among each other, and sometimes individual members slide between different positions.

The Legendarium Reconstructionist conception of the Quendi stays fairly close to Tolkien's description. Members generally agree that the Quendi were a kind of advanced humans who deserve respect as ancestors rather than as deities. Members of a mytho-historical bent believe that modern humans, if they belong to the Line of Lúthien, can possess some measure of Elven genes. They also believe that 'faded Quendi' or Lingerers (cf. section 15.2.4 above) exist in our world (as opposed to the Blessed Realm). According to the narrator of *LR*, Quendi can still show themselves to humans in his time, and based on this statement, mytho-historical members consider myths and legends about fairies, *álfar*, and other such beings to reflect contact with faded Quendi in pre-Christian times.[531] In other words, they invert the intertextual chain with a source-product reversal, sugges-

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[531] In *LR*, the enunciative narrator states that Elves in "later days" were sometimes seen as "present and yet remote, a living vision of that which has already been left far behind by the flowing streams of Time" (*LR* 373; cf. section 7.3.1).

ting that it is not Tolkien's depiction of the Quendi (product) which borrows from the *álfar* of myth (source), but the *álfar* of myth (source > product) who are echoes of the more real Quendi (product > source).[532] I have illustrated this characteristic source-product reversal in figure 16.2 below.

Figure 16.2. The Quendi-*Álfar* Relation as Source-Product Reversal
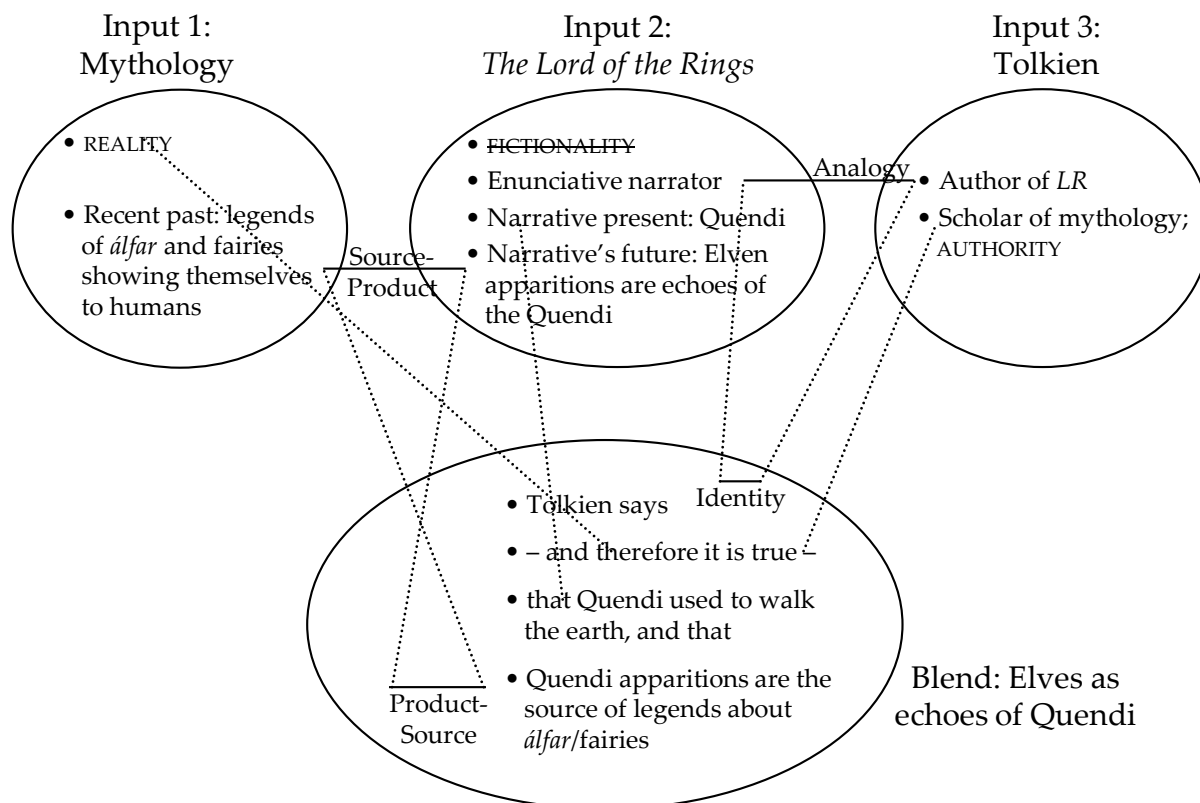
Some members view the Quendi in a way that goes somewhat beyond Tolkien's own formulations, and as we have seen this was one of the causes for the Ilsaluntë Valion hive-off. The members who stayed in Tië eldaliéva move beyond Tolkien in three ways. First, though they still view the Quendi as ancestors and believe that humans can possess Elven DNA, they believe that this Elven DNA, as a result of the sundering of the worlds, no longer is of a physical nature, but exists on a non-material plane. The non-physical nature of Elven DNA explains why it has not yet been proven by science to exist.[533] Second, though Tolkien's texts include no notion of mixed Elven/human souls, members of Tië eldaliéva believe that besides being in part genetically Elven, one can

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[532] This relation between the Quendi and the *álfar* is described on the "Beliefs" page on Tië eldaliéva's original homepage. See http://web.archive.org/web/20070810184835/ http://thehiddenrealm.org/ [140114].

[533] Also those members of Ilsaluntë Valion who believe that some (or all) contemporary humans have Elven ancestors propose to explain why this has not been verified by science. Instead of arguing that the Elven DNA is now situated on another plane, however, they argue that processes of genetic drift and gene deletion have made it close to impossible to detect Elven genes in present-day humans.

also possess a partly Quendian soul.[534] Third, the Elven-centred members of Tië eldaliéva are interested in the existence of other kinds of elves besides the Quendi, allowing especially for the existence of various lineages of star elves who are different both from the Quendi and from the purely spiritual "Fae" beings, i.e. the Valar, Maiar, and lesser elemental spirits. The members of Tië eldaliéva accept the existence of star elves because many members of the Elven community self-identify as such non-Quendian elves (cf. ch. 11 above).[535] They have even considered the possibility that also the Quendi might be star elves and that Middle-earth might be situated on an exo-planet in the Pleiades star cluster.[536]

While disagreement over the nature of the Elves was one of the causes of the schism, members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion largely agree on the nature of Eru and the Valar. Most fundamentally, they agree that Eru and the Valar exist and follow Tolkien's description of the relationship between them: Eru is the supreme deity and the Valar are created beings and subordinates to Eru. Therefore, while the members focus their ritual work on the Valar, they stress that they do not worship these beings. Especially the Christian members further point out that the Valar are not gods, but are rather on a par with (arch)angelic beings. Theological critics have argued that the Elves and humans in Tolkien's narratives treat the Valar more like Roman Catholic Saints than like angels, and this is arguably also an adequate description of how Legendarium Reconstructionists approach the Valar. Indeed, members de-emphasise the ontological diffe-

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[534] The notion of partly Quenyan souls goes together with a more general belief in human reincarnation. This belief is foreign to the Legendarium, in which only Elves reincarnate, but it is nevertheless the rule rather than the exception in the spiritual Tolkien milieu.

[535] The relation between Quendi, star elves, and Fae is discussed in detail on Tië eldaliéva's original FAQ page. See http://web.archive.org/web/20070810184835/http://thehiddenrealm.org/ [240114]. I think that the members found it necessary to clarify the relation between the Quendi and other types of Elves partly because Tië eldaliéva in 2007 was in contact with James Warren Maertens, the Druid mentioned in footnote 529 above. Maertens has developed a set of oracular Elvish Runes, a so-called Elvish Ogham, and claims that these Alferic runes are used by the Sarithin, a certain kind of star elves. He further claims that Eranor, the language of the Sarithin Elves, has "linguistic ties and affinities to Quenya and Sindarin" which he claims that Tolkien "discovered" rather than "invented". Departing from Tolkien's notion of the Quendi being created and awakened in Middle-earth, Maertens claims that the elves originated from the stars. He furthermore asserts that Quenya split off from Eranor when some of the star elves went to earth. Certainly, some of the names for the 13 Elvish gods in Eranor (consider Oronwë, Tulan, and Ulmaran) have a striking similarity with the names of the Valar in Quendi (Oromë, Tulkas, and Ulmo), but the most sober explanation is that Maertens borrowed from Tolkien. See http://www.bardwood.com/RIANAR.HTML [140812]. The relation between Tolkien's Quendi and the elves with whom Maertens claims to have a connection is also discussed in the lecture quoted in footnote 529 (Maertens 2007, 14).

[536] The notion of star elves actually has some foundation in Tolkien's texts. Star elves or En-keladim are mentioned on one occasion in the Legendarium, namely in Ramer's account of his space travel experiences in *The Notion Club Papers* (*SD* 206). Even so, Tolkien nowhere discusses the relationship between the Quendi and other Elves. In the narratives set in Middle-earth, Tolkien furthermore never suggests the existence of non-Quendian Elves, nor does he consider the Quendi to originate from the stars.

rence between themselves and the Valar and approach them as teachers and role models or even as friends with whom they "hang out" as Calantirniel and Llefyn jokingly put it when I participated in one of their Skype rituals.

Pagan and Christian members alike feel uncomfortable with the depiction in Tolkien's tales of Eru Ilúvatar as a male, theistic being residing in distant sovereignty outside the created World. The Pagan members subscribe to a fundamentally holistic outlook in which it makes sense to talk of a pantheistic Spirit, but in which there is no room for a strong dualistic division between Creator and Creation. Actually, the same goes for the Christian core members Alyras, who describes herself as a Charismatic Christian interested in esoteric Christianity, and Niennildi, who self-identifies as a meta-physical Christian and belongs to the Unity Church, a New Thought-oriented church somewhat similar to Christian Science. The shared holistic world-view made for an alliance between Pagan and Christian members on the issue of rationalising Eru. Members wanted to be true to the Legendarium, but would not give up something as important as their basic conception of the divine. Elwin squared the circle by declaring first Tië eldaliéva and later Ilsaluntë Valion *panentheistic*, stating that Eru is *both* outside Eä, such as Tolkien says, *and* Eä itself, such as the holistic world-view of the members dictates. Elwin supported this view with a reference to Tolkien's own texts, pointing out that Eru creates the world by sending his creative power, the Secret Fire or the Flame Imperishable, into the Void (cf. section 15.2.1 above). Even so, Tolkien himself never referred to this theology as panentheism and would probably rather have seen it as a reflection of Christian omnipresentism.

A parallel discussion has taken place regarding Eru Ilúvatar's gender. Pointing out that Tolkien prefers to refer to this deity as Eru (Qu: The One), while Ilúvatar (Qu: All-father) is merely a name used by the inhabitants of Arda (*S* 3), members have argued both that Tolkien intended to portray Eru in gender neutral terms, and that Eru indeed probably *is* gender neutral. Going one step further, members have argued that the personal, male Ilúvatar should ultimately be treated as a metaphor for Ilúvë (Qu: All That Is), the real non-personal and un-gendered divine power. In other words, the Legendarium Reconstructionists have made Ilúvatar subject to a process of dynamistic transformation. As a further corollary of the holistic conception of Eru, members reinterpret the Timeless Halls and Eru's act of creation in non-dualistic, emanentist terms. Where the Timeless Halls in Tolkien's mythology is a place, indeed a kind of Heaven outside Eä, Legendarium Reconstructionists either bracket this very notion or dissolve the distinction between Eru (the person) and the Timeless Halls (his place). Furthermore, where Tolkien lets Eru create the Valar and Eä in the different ways, the Valar being described as "the offspring of [Eru's] thought" (*S* 3) and Eä being created *ex nihilo* with a word, Legendarium Reconstructionists tend to see *both* Eä and the Valar as "thought emanations" from Eru/Ilúvë/Spirit.

In ritual, Legendarium Reconstructionists treat the Valar as discrete, spiritual beings. In theoretical discussions outside ritual, the status of the Valar as independent

powers or angels is either cemented (literal affirmation), or they are referred to as "energies", "archetypes", or even "archetypal energies". It is tricky to discern what that means exactly, for 'energy' and 'archetype' are flexible concepts that can carry different meanings, including some that are conventional within the cultic milieu, but may seem odd for an outsider. Crucially, the reference to the Valar as energies is not meant to reduce them to non-personal powers or cosmic principles: One can be energy and a person at the same time. In expressions such as "I resonate with the archetypal energies embodied by the Valar", 'energy' thus means much the same as 'spirit' or 'soul'. Furthermore, not only the Valar are essentially considered to be energies. Those members who speak of the Valar as energies will also say that humans are ultimately made up of energy. Indeed, that is why humans can have "vibration levels" and that allows them to "resonate" with the Valar. That the Valar embody *archetypal* energy means that they are beings with more refined energy levels than humans, or, put differently, that they are beings of a more spiritual and less material nature. In other words, even when the Valar are spoken of as energies, the point is always that they are more spiritual than humans, not that they are less personal. I therefore hesitate to label this ontology assessment dynamistic transformation, although it certainly goes in that direction.

The reference to the Valar as "archetypes" not only stresses their position in the spiritual hierarchy, but also indicates that they are thought to stand in some relation to the deities of other pantheons. I have encountered three different views on this issue among Legendarium Reconstructionists. The first view, which many Pagan members share, is the most cautious. According to this view the Valar are just one expression of a group of more fundamental archetypes, which in turn are seen either as spiritual beings or cosmic powers (but never as psychological structures). The general idea is that a number of spiritual beings exist, but that different cultures interpret these beings differently. Going along with this logic, Calantirniel argues, for example, that there exists an archetypal Star Queen who expresses herself as Varda in Tolkien's literary mythology, but takes on other guises in other mythologies. Even those members who hold this cautious view will say that they personally have the greatest affinity with the guises taken by the archetypal beings in Tolkien's mythology, and their terminology will often slide so that they speak of the Valar as "Tolkien's archetypes" even when they mean to say that Tolkien's Valar are merely archetypal images of other, more fundamental archetypes.[537] The second view of the nature of the Valar is really a variation of the first. Also this view holds that Tolkien's Valar are merely one possible interpretation of a set of more fundamental archetypes, but it adds that Tolkien's interpretation probably gives a more accurate depiction than other mythologies, because it has not been handed down for generations with all the risks of distortion that entails. The third view is bolder and simply states that the Valar and Maiar *are* the archetypes. According to this view, the Valar and

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[537] As pointed out in chapter 5, this terminological slide is common. In the cultic milieu, 'archetype' can refer both to the archetypal source and the archetypal expression.

Maiar have revealed themselves to people around the world. Different people have given the Valar different names and tell different tales about them, but in ritual these people really address the Valar even if they do so in their local guises. Only Tolkien describes the Valar and the Maiar as they really are.

16.3.3. The Concept of Gnosis: Disagreements on Justification

In its Charter, Ilsaluntë Valion describes itself as "a gnostic research group". Literally, gnosis means 'knowledge', but like esotericists in general, Legendarium Reconstructionists use the term to refer more specifically to knowledge of spiritual matters achieved through trancework. All members agree that gnosis is a particular *mode* of knowing, namely one governed by the imagination rather than by ordinary 'five sense'-perception or reason. They disagree, however, on the *epistemological status* of gnosis. Three epistemological positions can be discerned. Most members, especially the Pagans, consider the Valar to be ontologically real, but have not given much thought to the epistemological questions 'how one can *know* that the Valar are real?' This group justifies its beliefs with reference to subjective experience, but justification takes place implicitly and the epistemological value attributed to subjective experience varies. A second group of Legendarium Reconstructionists, which is largely found outside Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion, assert that gnosis can be a source of objective knowledge and is therefore not fundamentally different from other kinds of knowledge. The third group of self-identified 'gnostic explorers' assert that one cannot ask whether gnosis is subjective or objective because gnosis by its very nature transcends the categorical distinction between the subjective and the objective.

Even the majority of (Pagan) members who do not think systematically about epistemology, do justify their beliefs with a straightforward reference to subjective experience. They refer mainly to their own, first-person experience, but also to the second-person experiences of their peers and to Tolkien's third-person experiences as these are attested in his "channelled" writings. As pointed out in chapter 5 above, subjective experience can both be used to objectivise and de-objective beliefs, and this allows these members to slide between an objectivising and a subjectivising conception of gnosis. Their default mode is to view gnosis in objective terms, arguing straightforwardly – or assuming implicitly – that their subjective experiences demonstrate that the Valar and the Blessed Realm really exist. In other words, the Pagans use their subjective experiences as a source of *legitimisation*, i.e. as evidence for the referentiality of their belief assertions. When confronted with sceptic outsiders, however, most Pagans members are prepared to switch mode and slide into a subjectivising conception of gnosis. De-objectivising their beliefs, they will then say that Tolkien spirituality is all about "what works" and what "feels right" and that those things differ from person to person. Such *subjectivisation* can be prudent as it eliminates the plausibility threat caused by the sceptics: the critics miss their mark when they say that it is stupid to assert that the Valar objectively

exist, for we only claim that we have meaningful experiences of the Valar and that Tolkien spirituality is therefore valid for us.

The second epistemological position explicitly considers knowledge obtained with psychic means to be as objective as other knowledge. Parapsychologists, who attempt to prove the reality of telepathy, fall into this category, as does Camille Flammarion whose psychic research on the reality of astral fairies was mentioned in chapter 10. Within the spiritual Tolkien milieu, the objectivising approach is characterised by three claims: (1) Tolkien's narratives are reliable sources of factual information about the supernatural; (2) it can be *proved* that this is the case; and (3) anyone can obtain objective knowledge through psychic means in the way Tolkien did it. One Tolkien religionist who holds this view is Xavier de la Huerga, who briefly was a member of Ilsaluntë Valion, but left again because his objectivising approach to gnosis clashed too strongly with the compartmentalist approach to gnosis of Ilsaluntë Valion's leaders (to which I return below). Consider as example of the objectivising position a talk given by Xavier de la Huerga at the Tolkien Society's conference The Return of the Ring, which was held 16-20 August 2012 at Loughborough University. De la Huerga's talk was entitled "From 2012 to Atlantis and back again: Tolkien's Time-Travelling and the Notion Club Papers Mystery"; his abstract went:

> *I offer evidence* that Tolkien did somehow accomplish some form of time-travel, or else what could be termed pre-cognitive and retro-cognitive insights in writing his unfinished novel The Notion Club Papers. From the uncanny prediction of the Great Storm of 1987, to the odd coincidences that connect the story with the Mayan Long Count Calendar (whose cycle of 5,125 years finishes in 2012), the Black Monday Stock Market Crash of 1987 and other enigmatic facts. […] I will […] show how auto-biographical The Notion Club Papers is and how it can be read as a 'metaphysical manifesto' of sorts, a document revealing Tolkien's innermost visionary experiences, often going deep into the realm of mysticism and the paranormal (emphasis added).[538]

As I have shown in section 15.1.2 above, *The Notion Club Papers* indeed includes autobiographical features, and Tolkien at least incorporated one unusual experience of his, the Great Wave dream, into the text. De la Huerga goes further, however, and claims that Tolkien actually predicted a number of future events, including the Great Storm of 1987. In the *Notion Club Papers*, the fictional editor, who is writing in 2012, observes that the minutes from the Notion Club, written in the 1940s, quite accurately predicted certain major events, including the Great Storm of 1987, taking place on June 12th within the fictional world (*SD* 157). There is an obvious parallel between, on the one hand, the prediction within the fictional world, and, on the other hand, the fact that Tolkien himself wrote in 1940s and that a real hurricane, "The Great Storm of 1987", struck Great Britain

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[538] http://www.returnofthering.org/timetable_items.php#Huerga [100214].

on the night of 15-16 October 1987. Even though the exact dates differ between Tolkien's fictional Great Storm and the actual Great Storm, De la Huerga is convinced that Tolkien's text proves that "pre-cognitive" insights about the future are possible, that Tolkien had in fact discovered a way to obtain such insights, and that this had enabled him to predict various future events.[539] By the same token, De la Huerga believes that Tolkien had achieved "retro-cognitive" insights in past events.[540]

Those members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion who read Tolkien's literary mythology in a mytho-historical mode seem to share De la Huerga's objectivising approach, but they only do so to some extent. Indeed, these members consider it possible to obtain gnosis about the material world through psychic means, such as ancestral memory regression, as Tolkien describes this technique in *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. These members also compare the history of the Legendarium with the historical record of the actual world. They refer, for instance, to research on Doggerland, the landmass that used to connect Great Britain and continental Europe before the Ice Age, and point out that the pre-historical coastline of Europe quite closely fits the coastline on Tolkien's maps of Middle-earth. They also have not failed to see that Tolkien in *The Notion Club Papers* seems to have predicted the Great Storm of 1987. Members of a mytho-historical bent refer, furthermore, to Laurence Gardner's speculations on the Elven bloodline (cf. ch. 12) to back up their belief in the Line of Lúthien, and they cite Martin Baker's articles on the Tresco Manuscript (cf. section 16.1.1) to add weight to their general belief that Tolkien's stories have an historical core.[541] Even so, the mytho-historical members of Ilsaluntë Valion differ from De la Huerga in that they do not speak in terms of proof, evidence, and objective truth. They take delight in pointing out parallels or "synchronicities" between established history and Tolkien's narratives, and they may personally be convinced that Tolkien's narratives include some measure of historical truth. But they cautiously leave it to "further research" to determine whether Tolkien's narratives are 'really' and objectively historical.

Elwin has developed an elaborate justification for Ilsaluntë Valion's mytho-historical speculations which works by dissolving the very border between the objective and the subjective. Elwin goes as far as to argue that there is no 'objective reality', only a multitude of reality-versions which subjects can tap into. There exists what might be

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[539] A large portion of the audience, including Verlyn Flieger, left in outrage during De la Huerga's talk, to the apparent surprise of the speaker.

[540] Another Tolkien religionist who holds an objectivising approach to gnosis is William Norman. Norman hosts the blog Gnostic Tolkienology at http://www.gnostictolkienology.blogspot.com/ [070214].

[541] Probably inspired by Laurence Gardner and Nicholas de Vere (cf. section 12.2 above), Lomelindo even expressed the belief that Tolkien *knew* that he was writing actual history about the Elven bloodline, but that he had to mask the truth as myth so as not to risk his job and reputation. Lomelindo also interpreted Tolkien's gradual Christianisation of the Legendarium as the tainting of an originally pure and pagan vision which Tolkien did not have the courage to uphold.

called a 'consensus reality', namely the reality version which most people, inter-subjectively, consider the 'real' world, but ultimately this reality version is no more real than the alternate realities. Even though the alternate realities are not objective, they are ontologically real and hence *more* than just subjective ways of experiencing reality. Tolkien's Legendarium tells of one of these alternate realities, and the ontological and epistemological status of this world thus hovers between the subjective and the objective. According to this view, gnosis is knowledge about the various alternate realities, and Elwin therefore refers to knowledge obtained in Legendarium-based spiritual experiences specifically as "Tolkien-affine gnosis". Tolkien-affine gnosis is true of its own world, the alternate reality constituted by the Legendarium, but not (necessarily) true also of consensus reality. In other words, Elwin divides the world into two compartments, so to speak, namely consensus reality and the 'set of alternate realities', and he considers gnosis to be true but non-objective knowledge of the alternate realities. Elwin told me that he does not *experience* the world as divided into distinct compartments, however, as he constantly and easily switches between two "cognitive modes", i.e. the "rational" mode directed towards consensus reality and the "shamanic" mode directed towards the alternate realities. Given the ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological duality of Elwin's position, his mode of justification can be categorised as a form of *compartmentalisation*, i.e. 'the position that religious beliefs constitute their own province of meaning and that their truth can therefore not be determined rationally, but only according to its own logic or language game' (cf. section 5.1.4 above). It is the first time we encounter this sophisticated type of justification in the spiritual Tolkien milieu.[542]

Where Elwin's justification is developed to fit a mytho-historical take on Tolkien's Legendarium, Gwineth has developed a similar epistemological position fit for the mytho-cosmological approach. Like Elwin, she rejects the subjectivising stance on gnosis, i.e. experiences are generated purely be the individual psyche, as well as the objectivising stance, i.e. experiences are straightforward perceptions of what objectively exists, and adopts a compartmentalist position, stating that neither the subjectivising nor the objectivising approach is true. For Gwineth, gnostic experiences are of a radically different kind pertaining to a world (ontologically speaking) or to a province of meaning (phenomenologically speaking) that transcends such rational distinctions as true/false and objective/subjective.

Most fundamentally, Gwineth distinguishes between two complementary cognitive modes, the rational mode and the imagination. Following Hoeller, she furthermore states

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[542] Elwin furthermore argues that time is largely an illusion and that everything ultimately happens simultaneously. From this point of view, he explains, the statement "the Valar influenced early humanoid conceptions of gods" (which he holds to be true) is just as valid as the statement "early humanoid conceptions of gods influenced Tolkien's characterizations of the Valar". This view on time echoes W.J. Dunne's (cf. footnote 475 above), a fact that Elwin was well aware of. He said, however, that he had developed this view in response to a Salvia-induced experience, and that he had only subsequently become aware of Dunne's theory and its influence on Tolkien by reading Verlyn Flieger's work.

that these two psychological faculties are used to perceive different part of the reality – the Factual World and the Imaginal Realm. As Gwineth is quick to stress, this ontological distinction is *not* one between objective reality (the Factual World) and a subjective, psychological, or made-up fantasy world. It is rather a distinction between a part of reality in which such a distinction makes sense (the Factual World) and a part of the world in which it does not (the Imaginal Realm). The Imaginal Realm is not the realm of fantasy, but a part of reality, existing beyond the everyday world of facts, in which distinctions such as that between the objective and the subjective break down.[543] The ontological and phenomenological distinctions between the Factual World/rationality and the Imaginal Realm/imagination are mirrored by an epistemological distinction. One can have objective knowledge of the Factual World, but knowledge of the Imaginal Realm, referred to as 'gnosis', is of a different character: Since the Imaginal Realm is real, gnosis is true, but since the Imaginal Realm exists beyond the borders of the Factual World, gnosis is true in a way that transcends the distinction between the objective and the subjective: it is not factually true in the objective sense, but neither subjective in the crude sense of being made up. Gnosis is true in a way that cannot be described in terms of rational reasoning; one has to experience it and intuitively "get it". According to Gwineth, Tolkien conceived of the relation between World and Faery in much the same way as the relation between the Factual World and the Imaginal Realm described above. To demonstrate this, she referred me to a passage in a draft of *On Fairy-Stories*, the so-called 'Manuscript B', in which Tolkien wrote:

> The Land of Fairy Story is wide and deep and high [...] In that land a man may (perhaps) count himself fortunate to have wandered, but its very mystery and wealth make dumb the traveller who would report [...] The fairy gold (too often) turns to withered leaves when it is brought away. All that I can ask is that you, knowing all these things, will receive my withered leaves, as a token at least that my hand once held a little of the gold (Flieger and Donaldson 2008, 207).[544]

Gwineth took this quote to indicate that Tolkien believed to have experienced Faery (here called "The Land of Fairy Story"), but that he struggled to describe his experiences to his academic peers, because those experiences, while real and immensely significant, could not be grasped rationally, nor properly expressed in language. As Tolkien put it in the published version of *OFS*, "Faërie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible" (*TL* 16).

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[543] That is not to say that the Factual World and the Imaginal Realm are experienced as disconnected. On the contrary, members of Ilsaluntë Valion consider the Imaginal Realm a completely natural part of overall reality, and consider visits to the Imaginal Realm crucial for their wellbeing and creativity in the Factual World.

[544] Gwineth had first encountered this quote in a lecture entitled "J.R.R. Tolkien: An Imaginative Life" by Lance Owen, an associate of Stephen Hoeller. See http://gnosis.org/tolkien/ [300114].

It was extremely important for both Elwin and Gwineth to stress that they were no Tolkien literalists. They consider their spiritual experiences within the Tolkien-framework to reflect contact with a real spiritual world, but do not make any claims about the objective or factual reality of the content of those experiences or of Tolkien's narratives. For Elwin and Gwineth, embedding Tolkien spirituality within a sophisticated epistemological framework, indeed a 'philosophy of Tolkien spirituality', made all the difference – in Elwin's words – between being "eccentrics" and being "nutcases". While very much aware that most outsiders at best considered them eccentrics, the gnostic members of Ilsaluntë Valion themselves do not feel that Tolkien spirituality is in need of additional justification compared to more conventional religious practices. To the contrary, they hold that *any* kind of spirituality or religion must be embedded within a serious philosophical framework to be legitimate.

For the gnostic/compartmentalist members, the epistemological devaluation of Tolkien's literary mythology vis-à-vis his original experiences has the practical consequence that the narratives need no longer be the focus in ritual. The gnostics still wish to be true to Tolkien, but believe that they can best be so by emulating what he did, i.e. opening themselves up to Faery/the Imaginal Realm and seeing what happens. It is partly for this reason that the gnostic members prefer simple meditations over elaborate, ceremonial rituals.

16.3.4. Semiotic Plausibility Construction in Legendarium Reconstructionism: A Summary

Certain patterns emerge from the discussion of rationalisation and justification in this section and the analysis of religious blending in the previous section. To begin with, it is possible to distinguish in rough terms between two member types in Legendarium Reconstructionism online. The larger group of members is comprised largely of Pagans who aim to build a new Legendarium-based tradition by acculturating Neo-Pagan and ceremonial magical rites and by solidifying their calendar, beliefs, symbols, and correspondence system into a stable system.[545] These members want collective rituals and consider the Valar to be real beings of whom one can have reliable knowledge. This 'traditionalist' type of members is found both in Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion. The second and smaller group of members is found only in Ilsaluntë Valion. These members have a non-Pagan background and take Tolkien himself, rather than the Elves or humans of his narratives, as role model for their own spiritual practice. Identifying their approach as "gnostic", these members focus on individual meditations through which they explore the Imaginal Realm/Faery just as Tolkien is believed to have done. Like Tolkien, they furthermore refrain from ascribing objectivity to their experiences. Both tradi-

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[545] Calantirniel plans to publish a book on Tolkien-based Elven Spirituality with all this information and sent me a synopsis.

tionalist and gnostic members take Tolkien's literary mythology to constitute their exclusive body of authoritative texts and both can therefore be characterised as Reconstructionist in the sense of 'ideally non-eclectic'. Only the traditionalist members are Reconstructionists also in the second meaning of the term, as only these members actively seek to build a new tradition based on the religion of the Elves as it can be reconstructed from Tolkien's literary mythology.

Two further observations must be made about rationalisation and justification in Legendarium Reconstructionism. First, it is striking that while the presence of non-Tolkienesque elements in rituals has been a source of much tension (cf. section 16.2 above), no-one has challenged the legitimacy of borrowing strategies of rationalisation from the wider cultic milieu. Even those who are purists when it comes to rituals, matter-of-factly rationalise the Valar as "archetypes" and situate Aman within the "Imaginal Realm". Along similar lines, it is noticeable that Legendarium Reconstructionism has been able to accommodate dissimilar ontology assessments among members, whereas dissimilar modes of religious practice have caused tension. It has not, for example, been experienced as a problem that some members consider the Valar to be angels, while others consider them to be archetypal energies. It has also not been a problem that some members consider Tolkien's narratives to partly correspond with actual history while others do not. This is because these differences in rationalisation, great as they may be, have not stood in the way of a shared elemental religious practice in which the Valar are straightforwardly addressed as spiritual beings exactly as they are described in Tolkien's literary mythology. By contrast, different ideas about ritual formats, i.e. whether to include Pagan and ceremonial magical rites or not, have been a source of much frustration. To sum up, on the level of rationalised religion, religious blending has been deemed unproblematic and diverging ontology assessments have been tolerated, while on the level of elemental religion, religious blending has been deemed highly problematic and divergent ideas about ritual practice been a cause of great tension. From this we can conclude that in Legendarium Reconstructionism, as in most religion, rationalised religion is secondary to elemental ritual practice, both in importance and potential for social tension. It might seem as counterevidence that diverging justification strategies have caused half a schism, as the gnostics/compartmentalists in Ilsaluntë Valion have established the independent sub-forum Anima Mundi. That is not the case, however, for it is not the diverging justification strategies *per se* that cannot be accommodated. The rise of the gnostic approach has only become a problem for the social cohesion of Ilsaluntë Valion because it goes together with a different and more individualised form of ritual practice.

16.3.5. Revisiting the Four Hypotheses on Religion based on *A History of Middle-earth*

With the analysis of Legendarium Reconstructionism in place, it is now possible to revisit and evaluate the four hypotheses from chapter 15 concerning *HoMe*-based religion. I hypothesised that *HoMe*-based religion would (1) focus on the Valar as communication partners in ritual, with the Quendi playing only a secondary role; that it would (2) take a mytho-cosmological or possibly even a mytho-historical approach to Tolkien's literary mythology; that it (3) might or might not go together with a self-identification as Elves; and that (4) Tolkien would probably be taken as a role model for communicating with the Otherworld/Faery.

Before assessing these hypotheses, it is necessary to contemplate the very assumption that Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion are based on *HoMe*. In fact, that is a truth with modifications. As I remarked earlier in this chapter, Tië eldaliéva actually drew and draws primarily on *S* – which Calantirniel labelled the tradition's "Bible" on the group's original homepage. By comparison, Ilsaluntë Valion puts more emphasis on *HoMe*, together with Tolkien's letters and essays. I will argue that many of the differences in religious practice between Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion can be explained by this difference in textual basis.

The first hypothesis, that *HoMe*-based religion would focus on the Valar, must be considered verified. The rituals of both Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion focus primarily on the Valar, and only in the second place on the Maiar, the Quendi, and Eru. Given the portrayal of the Valar in the *Book of Lost Tales*, I had further expected the two Legendarium Reconstructionist groups to treat the Valar as a pantheon of gods. This is only the case among some of the Pagan members, however, while especially the Christian members strongly emphasise the merely angelic status of the Valar. The panentheistic interpretation of Eru took me completely by surprise, but that only demonstrates the obvious, namely that religious practice can never be predicted completely based on the authoritative texts that support it (cf. Malley 2004). This is the case even in explicitly Reconstructionist religion.

The second hypothesis was that *HoMe*-based religion would approach Tolkien's narratives in a mytho-cosmological or mytho-historical mode and back this up with references to Tolkien's letters and unfinished frame narratives. Also this hypothesis has been verified. Indeed, members of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion consider Tolkien's texts to refer to real supernatural beings and they make no attempt to 'restore' them as really something else. The Valar are not reduced, for example, to expressions of Jungian archetypes or to images of the God and the Goddess. Similarly, the Quendi are not merely taken to be references to the 'real' fairies, but taken to constitute a class of beings of their own. The approach to Tolkien's literary mythology in Legendarium Reconstructionism is therefore mytho-cosmological (when not mytho-historical) rather than merely mythopoeic or binocular. I had furthermore hypothesised that *HoMe*-based religion

would consider only the Blessed Realm to be an otherworld while identifying Middle-earth with the actual world, either literally or metaphorically so. This is indeed the case for those Legendarium Reconstructionists who draw mainly on *HoMe*. Those members who take both the Blessed Realm and Middle-earth to exist on another plane or within the Imaginal Realm all consider other texts more central than *HoMe*, whether these be *S* (in the case of Tië eldaliéva members) or *OFS* and *Smith of Wootton Major* (in the case of some gnostic members in Ilsaluntë Valion).

I found it difficult to predict whether *HoMe*-based religion would go together with the self-identification as humans or Elves because *HoMe* includes texts both with an Elvish and with a Mannish point of view. In fact, most members draw on the motif of the Line of Lúthien to identify as a bit of both, namely as humans with some measure of Elven genes. Those Legendarium Reconstructionists who are more Elven-centred than this, and who count also on the possibility of Elven souls and star elves, are all active in largely *S*-based Tië eldaliéva.

My fourth hypothesis was that *HoMe*-based religion would take Tolkien as a spiritual role model and seek to emulate his experiences of Faery. That has certainly been the case. All members use meditation and visualisation to induce experiences of Faery/the Imaginal Realm, but as might be expected, it is especially the non-Pagan (and thus metaphysically or nominally Christian) members who most directly take Tolkien as their role model. By comparison, the Pagan members, including those in Ilsaluntë Valion, continue to see the Elves as their spiritual guides and role models.

In chapter 15, I formulated a fifth meta-hypothesis, namely that the nature of *HoMe*-based religion would be easier to predict than had been the case with religion based on *LR*, *S*, and the movies. This has been true to a large extent. I hypothesised Valar-directed religion, a mytho-cosmological or mytho-historical reading mode, uncertainty about whether to adopt a human or Elven perspective, and the use of Tolkien as a role model. All of this indeed characterises Legendarium Reconstructionism. On the other hand, this chapter also reveals that the religious affordances of a religious group's authoritative text can only predict the content of actual practice in very broad terms. Even among Legendarium Reconstructionists, who explicitly profess to be true to Tolkien's texts, rituals and rationalisations are determined largely by what Stanley Fish (1980) would call the religionists' 'interpretive communities', rather than by the exact content of the authoritative texts. Concretely, Pagan members and Christian members interpret Tolkien's texts differently and find different ritual approaches most natural and they do so for reasons that lie entirely outside the authoritative texts themselves.

16.4. Explaining the Relative Success of the Legendarium Reconstructionist Online Communities

In chapter 14, I stated that there are two main types of second wave Tolkien spirituality: Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism. By now, a number of differences between the two religionisation styles have become apparent. Middle-earth Paganism draws inspiration from the *LR* movies, focuses on ritual interaction with *LR* characters, and offers itself as an 'expansion pack', so to speak, for Neo-Pagans who want to try out a new pantheon. Legendarium Reconstructionism, by contrast, is based on *S* and *HoMe*, tolerates little blending of Tolkien's literary mythology with other religious frameworks, and focuses on the exploration of Tolkien's narrative world in meditation.

Middle-earth Paganism and Legendarium Reconstructionism differ not only substantively as different religionisation styles. The two modes also differ in their ability to produce stable and enduring online communities. Let me therefore now return to the question posed in chapter 14: why have the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups survived, despite tensions and divergent opinions, while Middle-Earth Pagans (and most of the other online communities discussed in chapter 14) have crumbled so fast?

I think there are five reasons for the relative success of the Legendarium Reconstructionist online communities. First, the Legendarium Reconstructionist forums have been much better moderated. The Tië eldaliéva forum was easy to navigate and discussions were streamlined and kept on-topic; the same has been true for Ilsaluntë Valion's forum. This has provided members with the feeling of contributing to a common project and counteracted the 'strain to variety' that caused the forums of Middle-Earth Pagans, Children of the Valar, Faer en Edhel Echuiad, the Eldalondë Society, and many other groups to lose focus and collapse. It is no surprise that the number of failed Tolkien-based online communities dwarfs the number of successful ones, for a strongly moderated forum requires considerable effort. When I first talked to Elwin in 2009, he told me that he devoted "perhaps 5-6 hours daily" to Ilsaluntë Valion and "sometimes much more if there is a crisis" (050909). Later moderators have used less time than this, but still much. Significantly, not all the time invested by the moderators goes into moderating the forum, and that leads me to the second reason for the relative success of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion.

The primary information channel in these groups has never been the forums. The most significant discussions take place bilaterally, over chat, phone, or email, and new ideas are mostly generated and tested in this way before being introduced on the forum. Not only core members communicate in this way, new members typically have much contact with the captain/moderator or another mentor figure via email for some time before becoming active posters on the forum. As mentioned in section 16.1.3 above, a mentor system was formalised in the early years of Ilsaluntë Valion, and even though that is no longer the case, the captain still functions as a sort of mentor for new members, especially young joiners. I do not know whether members of the groups discussed in

chapter 14 also supplemented forum discussions and group emails with bilateral communication, but I dare say that for religious online groups to survive, it is necessary that individual members build relations with each other and come to feel loyalty towards specific other individuals rather than only towards the group. This is no different, of course, from how the cohesion of social groups in general can benefit from strong ties between individual group members.

A third reason for the success of Tië eldaliéva and Ilsaluntë Valion has to do with their membership. Already when joining, the core members had a substantial knowledge about Tolkien's literary mythology, and most had already experimented with Tolkien-based rituals. They were intelligent and highly educated individuals in their 40s, 30s, or late 20s with plenty of knowledge and experience to share and to further develop together. This stands in contrast to the groups discussed in chapter 14 whose member majority consisted of young people who were fascinated by Elves and Jackson's movies, but were in no position to contribute substantially in terms of spiritual knowledge.

The fourth reason for the successful community formation of the Legendarium Reconstructionist groups is that the religionising of Tolkien's literary mythology in these groups has been co-ordinated. Especially in the beginning, the aim was to construct a new path or tradition. As we have seen, this often led to disagreement and tension, but it also led to the formulation of certain core ideas: the Legendarium constitutes the tradition's exclusive lore; the Valar are the main pantheon; one can "resonate" with Elven energies or view the Elves as humankind's ancestors, but no human can possess a completely Elven soul. Most significantly, rituals were developed and carried out together. Even though most members eventually found it unsatisfying to do rituals via Skype or over the phone, all members continued to believe that Tolkien's narratives describe a real world in some way, and that the various ritual techniques used by the members constitute a repertoire of legitimate ways of communicating with this otherworld and achieving "*olor*-messages" or gnosis about it.

Finally, I will argue that Legendarium Reconstructionism as a religionisation style is simply better suited for tradition-building than Middle-earth Paganism. This is true especially for the 'traditionalist' members for whom Legendarium Reconstructionism entails the construction of a self-sufficient religious tradition, an approach standing in sharp contrast to the modest Middle-earth Pagan aim of developing an optional Tolkien-esque add-on for eclectic Wiccans. Moreover, Legendarium Reconstructionism has the advantage of a much larger authoritative text corpus. *HoMe* simply takes more time and effort to discuss and digest than do the *LR* movies, and that provides for long-lived groups. Movie-based Middle-earth Paganism, by contrast, proved to have too little body for tradition-building: after trying out some movie-based rituals, most Middle-earth Pagans went back to being 'normal' Pagans, while a few went on to read *S* and *HoMe*, began working with the Valar, and hence turned into Legendarium Reconstructionists.

It must be noted, that the relative stability of the Legendarium Reconstructionist online cults as *social* units says nothing about the attractiveness of Legendarium Recon-

structionism relative to Middle-earth Paganism as a form of religion. The Legendarium Reconstructionist groups are stable, but they are small and do not grow. In fact, the number of present and former Middle-earth Pagans clearly dwarfs the number of active and formerly active Legendarium Reconstructionists. Working occasional rituals with Gandalf and Galadriel has proved to be no basis for tradition-forming and institutionalisation, but it has been attractive for individual Pagans all the same. From a numerical perspective, then, Middle-earth Paganism, rather than Legendarium Reconstructionism, must be considered the most successful expression of Tolkien religion in the 21st century.