



The inexhaustibility of the Church in Graham Greene's the Power and the Glory

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Abstract—

The priest is likened to Christ as Julius Caesar's initials like Jesus Christ are J.C. and there is the reference to the feeding of the five thousand with the references to fish and their multiplication. Hence despite all evidences to the contrary, the lieutenant has failed to eliminate faith from Mexico as the priest lives on in the boy's mind and seems to be resurrected as an image of martyrdom and sacred magic. The priest has come alive perhaps not mortally but as an image of sacred mystery and miracles in the imagination of the young boy and hence as Christ does is resurrected in the hearts and minds of his followers as an indwelling leader through the holy spirit which lives on in the minds of the followers of Christ even though he is not physically present on earth. Thus Greene has examined the nature of the inexhaustibility of the Church though the lieutenant has strived to eliminate all physical traces of the church the church is ultimately transcendental and lives on as a spiritual presence and an image of Christ that lives on in the minds and hearts of his followers even though Christ is no longer physically present on earth.

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In *The Power and the Glory*, the Catholic Church in Mexico is undergoing persecution and faces its last days as its priests are captured and executed or made to renounce their religious vows. In the story we follow the last days of the whiskey priest, who is fallen and sinful and has a problem with drinking and even succumbed to sins of the flesh and fathered a daughter. Yet it is his faith and heart for the downtrodden which

redeems him, it is this fallen priest who is made a saint at the end of the novel because he persists in faith and wishes to redeem those around him by giving a dying gangster his confessional though this turns out to be a trap by the authorities to take him into custody and execute him.

Graham Greene shows how much bravery the whiskey priest has when he can forgive people that betray him. An example of this is when the Mestizo tells the whiskey priest that a fellow fugitive and gangster is in trouble and needs him to allow him to form a confession and blessing. The Mestizo has cunningly set up a trap that later costs the whiskey priest his life, but the whiskey priest forgives the Mestizo.. This is best shown when he eventually forgives and even prays for the Mestizo who betrayed him: "The priest waved his hand; he bore no grudge because he expected nothing else of anything human..." (Greene, 2004: 198) This shows that that whiskey priest has a forgiving heart.

Graham Greene presents the whiskey priest as someone who puts others needs before his own. This is clearly evident when he goes to help the child's dying mother even though he knows that he will miss his boat:

But the stranger got up as though unwillingly he had been summoned to an occasion he couldn't pass by. He said sadly,

"It always seems to happen. Like this."



"You'll have a job not to miss the boat."

"I shall miss it," he said. (Greene, 2004: 17)

Hence while the whiskey priest is a wretched sinner who has fathered a child with Maria, Brigitta and who incessantly drinks, we see there are redeeming sides of his character, such as his ability to forgive easily and his constant desire to help others.

On the other hand, the whiskey priest is deeply alcoholic. . First early in the novel when we first meet the whiskey priest and he reveals a flask of brandy from the side of his hip:

"I have a little brandy," the stranger said.

Mr. Tench regarded him sharply. "Where?"

The hollow man put his hand to his hip- ... (Greene, 2004: 11)

Also when the lieutenant asks the whiskey priest if he would like one final drink:

"I've brought you some brandy."

"Against the law?"

"Yes."

"It's very good of you." He took the small flask. (Greene, 2004:206)

However in opposition to notions of saintliness, the whiskey priest commits a mortal sin of having a sexual relationship with Maria and getting her pregnant, and later abandoning his daughter Brigitta:

"When you-know-what happened, I was proud. I thought the good days would come back. It's not everyone who's a priest's women. And the child... I thought you could do a lot for her. But you

might as while be a thief for all the good..." (Greene, 2004: 79)

The whiskey priest has thus made use of Maria by having sex with her on a carnal impulse and then abandoning her to bring up Brigitta on her own, demonstrating that he is hardly a saint and that while he is capable of sometimes putting others needs before his own, he can at times and in this case be completely selfish and morally deplorable as he abandons responsibility for his own daughter to Maria who has suffered for years bringing up their illegitimate daughter Brigitta.

The priest feels though he wishes to escape the persecution by the lieutenant that he was still a servant to the Mexican people who he feels obliged to serve as their spiritual master.

"He had tried to escape, but he was like the King of a West African tribe, the slave of his people, who may not even lie down in case the winds should fail." (Greene, 2004:13).

The lieutenant on the other hand feels that by purging the Church from Mexico he is doing the people of Mexico a great favour by ridding Mexico of an institution which is rich, corrupt and has not helped the poor.

"He would eliminate from their childhood everything which had made him miserable, all that was poor, superstitious, and corrupt." (Greene, 2004:20)

Heat stood in the room like an enemy. But he believed against the evidence of his senses in the cold empty ether spaces. A radio was playing somewhere: music from Mexico City, or perhaps even from London or New York filtered into this obscure neglected state. It seemed to him like a weakness: this was his own land, and he would have walled it in with steel if he could, until he had eradicated from it everything which reminded him of how it had once appeared to a miserable child. He wanted to destroy everything: to be



alone without any memories at all.(Greene, 2004: 19)

Hence the lieutenant believes in the truth that nothing or absence rather than the transcendental such as God and faith exist. His belief is violent and strong and described as steel. He wants to destroy faith and belief in the supernatural as a strong atheist but the strength of his belief against the supernatural and things unseen seems as irrational as the faith he has so much against and seems to be a kind of faith itself- a belief in the actuality of nothing and absence over the transcendental- this is the lieutenant's unshakeable belief in the empirical over the transcendental. Greene however by using terms destroys and steel intimates what he truly thinks of the lieutenant's beliefs: that these are destructive and nihilistic and cruel thoughts which imprison the true faith that is the ultimate truth. The fact that another priest turns up at the end of the novel shows that faith cannot ever be annihilated from the world despite the lieutenant's efforts because as a true representation of the metaphysical state of the world, faith is bound to persist as while the lieutenant might want and wish to eliminate all traces of faith in humanity he cannot destroy the existence of God and the supernatural which is imminently real and accessible to those who possess faith in him.

Maria having known a darker side of the priest and the deadly irresponsibility he has by abandoning Brigitta and her is highly cynical of the priest's bid to be a Martyr. She knows the priest for the ugly fornication he had used her for on a carnal impulse while defecting his responsibility as a father by abandoning both her and Brigitta.

"Suppose you die. You'll be a martyr, won't you? What kind of a martyr do you think you'll make? It's enough to make people mock." (Greene, 2004: 76)

One mustn't have human affections—or rather one must love every soul as if it were one's own child. The passion to protect must extend itself over a world—but he felt it tethered and aching like a hobbling animal to the tree trunk. He turned his mule south.(Graham Greene 2004: 64)

The priest feels guilt over the daughter he has fathered and wishes on the other hand to extend this love he actually feels for his daughter to other members of the human race. In this we see the priest is redeemable through the love he feels for his daughter which he universalizes because of the guilt he feels at abandoning Brigitta and Maria. Hence we see the priest's love for his daughter is what potentially redeems him even though he has been a heartless and rotten father. But the priest though he has an inclination to protect his daughter is weak to act on his higher impulses as he is described as a hobbling animal and turns his mule south indicating though he has higher impulses he acts in a way that is contrary to those higher impulses of universal love and love for his daughter.

The lieutenant said in a tone of fury: "Well, you're going to be a martyr—you've got that satisfaction." "Oh, no. Martyrs are not like me. They don't think all the time—if I had drunk more brandy I shouldn't be so afraid."

(Greene, 2004:193)

The opposition between thinking and action is thus brought up by the priest in this passage but the priest underestimates himself. Though on the surface the priest is a rotten sinner his second thoughts always lead him to doing good as he helps the Mestizo and the child's dying mother. Hence the priest is capable of doing more good than he is aware of and is actually worthy of the title of martyr and saint at the end of the novel though he has committed mortal sin by having a child through illicit fornication and drinking heavily all his life.



The priest sheds all religious pretensions before the lieutenant and confesses that he does not comprehend a single thing about God's ways and mercies. He believes humanity is so fallen God may abhor every single human being that comes before him.

"I don't know a thing about the mercy of God: I don't know how awful the human heart looks to Him." (Greene 2004:194)

On the morning of his death the priest feels that he has let God down and has been a disappointment to God because he has been such a wretched sinner and not lived up to the ideals of priesthood by fathering a child through carnal impulses and then abandoning the child and mother and being an alcoholic all his life. He then truly feels, on his execution day, that only one thing had truly mattered, to be a good person and blameless before God, but just as the judgment of Pinkie in Brighton Rock was ambivalent, so is the judgment of the priest in the Power and the Glory because the priest has also helped people and has a heart for serving others and helping the downtrodden and God's forsaken.

"He knew now that at the end there was only one thing that counted—to be a saint." (Greene, 2004: 209)

He dreamed that the priest whom they had shot that morning was back in the house dressed in the clothes his father had lent him and laid out stiffly for burial. The boy sat beside the bed and his mother read out of a very long book all about how the priest had acted in front of the bishop the part of Julius Caesar: there was a fish basket at her feet, and the fish were bleeding, wrapped in her handkerchief. He was very bored and very tired and somebody was hammering nails into a coffin

in the passage. Suddenly the dead priest winked at him—an unmistakable flicker of the eyelid, just like that.(Greene, 2004: 219-220)

Greene examines reactions to the priest's death and in the young boy's dream Greene enacts a resurrection of the priest: The priest lives on in the boy's mind even though they have executed him and taken his mortal life. The priest is likened to Christ as Julius Caesar's initials like Jesus Christ are J.C. and there is the reference to the feeding of the five thousand with the references to fish and their multiplication. Hence despite all evidences to the contrary, the lieutenant has failed to eliminate faith from Mexico as the priest lives on in the boy's mind and seems to be resurrected as an image of martyrdom and sacred magic. The priest has come alive perhaps not mortally but as an image of sacred mystery and miracles in the imagination of the young boy and hence as Christ does is resurrected in the hearts and minds of his followers as an indwelling leader through the holy spirit which lives on in the minds of the followers of Christ even though he is not physically present on earth. Thus Greene has examined the nature of the inexhaustibility of the Church though the lieutenant has strived to eliminate all physical traces of the church the church is ultimately transcendental and lives on as a spiritual presence and an image of Christ that lives on in the minds and hearts of his followers even though Christ is no longer physically present on earth. Christ has always been a supernatural and otherworldly presence as he is the son of God and origin of the world.

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