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The Body and the Blood: Graham Greene's Incarnational Imagination

A Thesis

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By

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### The Body and the Blood: Graham Greene's Incarnational Imagination

While critics of the modern era have mostly rejected religious considerations in their evaluation of fiction, many recent scholars have begun to recognize the critical importance of taking into account religious worldviews in the process of interpretation. In the case of the British author Graham Greene and his "Catholic novels," few things could be more necessary. Indeed, in the words of Greene scholar Mark Bosco, "any discussion of Graham Greene forces the critic to come to terms with the role that the religious imagination plays in his literary creation" (*Catholic Imagination* 5).

In particular, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is central to Greene's novels, as can be seen through a close reading of how the author ties the physical nature of experience to a spiritual understanding of God. Indeed, Greene writes of a God who not only exists, but acts as a living being within the plot to shape events, their participants, and the nature of the world in which He acts. In the author's view as communicated through *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter*, and *The End of the Affair*, Christ embodied as God in human form elevates the significance and potential holiness of normal human bodily experience, creating the potential for God to work His mercy and love within the corrupted earthly world.

While religious themes are certainly not the only narrative aspects to be discussed in the works of Graham Greene, this analysis seeks to show the importance of evaluating Christian ideas for a deeper understanding particularly of his "Catholic novels." As will be demonstrated,

Greene relies heavily on the Christian idea of the Incarnation to frame the paradoxes of existence faced by the modern writer.

### **I. The Importance of the Incarnation**

Though the focus of this discussion will remain on literature, a brief explanation of the theological idea of the Incarnation is necessary for a clearer understanding of the theme to be examined. Christianity views the world, in the words of C.S. Lewis, as “a dance in which good, descending from God, is disturbed by the evil arising from the creatures, and the resulting conflict is resolved by God’s own assumption of the suffering nature which evil produces” (80). Understanding the importance of the Incarnation, then, starts with an understanding of the doctrine of “the Fall”: that God is good and made all things good, but that men disobeyed and therefore brought corruption into the world. This corruption is what Christians call sin, a term still familiar in the modern world with its implications of moral depravity. The idea of sin is not limited to individual wrong choices, however. It also carries with it the idea that all of human society and the rest of nature have been permeated with decay, leaving no aspect of life on earth free from corruption, death, and evil. Suffering is the consequence of this corruption; if God is good and right, then sin as disobedience is the opposite, resulting in pain rather than peace. The Christian, then, sees the world as a place of inherent suffering and pain as a result of the sins committed by human beings against the good rule of God.

The Incarnation is at the center of Christian thought because it represents God’s response to this corruption. According to Christianity, God saw the effects of sin and, rather than abandoning people to their own depravity, decided to save them. This salvation took a radical form: God became human and came to earth to suffer alongside humanity. This is the Incarnation: God’s embodiment as Jesus. Christianity, then, does not focus on moral teaching for

a new way of living so much as it revolves around the life, death, and resurrection of the person of Jesus. Theologian N.T. Wright asserts that

Christianity is about something that *happened*...In other words, Christianity is *not* about a new moral teaching...Christianity is all about the belief that the living God, in fulfillment of his promises and as the climax of the story of Israel, has accomplished all this—the finding, the saving, the giving of new life—in Jesus. (91-92)

Christians believe that by becoming human, suffering and dying by crucifixion, and miraculously rising from the dead, Jesus took on the punishment for sin that he did not deserve in order to redeem humanity from the consequences of their sin and the sins of their ancestors. His suffering fulfills the punishment that rebellious humanity deserves for their sin, providing them with an opportunity to reconnect with God and find peace and fulfillment in Him, a restoration of the unity that was lost with the first disobedience.

The implications of the Incarnation for Christian theology are too widespread to be examined in detail here, but a few major ideas can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The Incarnation means that God has not abandoned humanity and that He is not a distant, uninterested deity. The Christian God loves, cares about, and is involved in human affairs, even in individual human lives.
- 2) The Incarnation means that God understands, and has even participated in, human suffering. He knows what it is to live a human life, and therefore knows all human weakness, temptation, reasoning, and suffering from a firsthand perspective.
- 3) The Incarnation means that human suffering is no longer a meaningless, empty experience of the consequences of sin. Rather, it has the power to bring one

into relationship with Christ; in other words, to remind one of the first two points: that God loves and God knows.

- 4) The Incarnation means that God is not powerless to work within the corruption of the world. Rather, He is powerfully working to bring heaven into the hell of corrupted existence. In the words of N.T. Wright, “Something has happened in and through Jesus as a result of which the world is a different place, a place where heaven and earth have been joined forever” (116).

The doctrine of the Incarnation, then, places at the center of Christianity a few significant paradoxes. First, and perhaps most significant within Greene’s novels, is the paradox of the sinning saint. Since suffering is caused by sin, and God through Christ came to experience and redeem suffering, then those who sin are closer to the God who suffered. Indeed, as Jesus himself asserts, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick... For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9:12, NIV). Paradoxically, then, it is not one who believes oneself to be without sin that is closest to God, but rather one who recognizes oneself to be a sinner, knowledgeable of one’s own inability to achieve perfection and receptive to God’s mercy. Through the Incarnation, Christ suffered with those suffering the consequences of sin to offer grace in the midst of depravity, transforming sin and suffering into means by which God can reach humanity.

Second, though no less important, is the paradox of the holy God present within unholy human activity. Common sense would dictate that a God who is holy does not come into contact with unholy things, namely a corrupted humanity. The Incarnation, however, turns this conception on its head, instead revealing a God very much involved in human affairs, entering into ordinary individual lives in the midst of depravity. As a result, the very sinful actions of an

individual may be used by God to bring one into a better understanding and relationship with Him. For example, as demonstrated in Greene's novels, sinful acts might bring one to humility and therefore a closer relationship with God than one could have ever attained during a period of presumed sinlessness. Rather than a holy God who distances Himself from sin, Christ through the Incarnation brings the holy into the midst of the sinful in order to transform the sinful into something holy.

As can be seen then, the Incarnation, with its theological significance and wide implications, sits at the center of a Christian understanding of the world and contains complex paradoxes worthy of detailed evaluation. The idea that God came as a human being, suffered as a human being, and experienced all that it is to be a human being shapes everything about how a Christian views the world, from understanding suffering to the possibility of God's participation in reality.

## **II. Graham Greene: Faith and Fiction**

This analysis will also not focus on the personal faith of the author, but rather on the narratives themselves in its discussion of Christian themes in Greene's novels. But before engaging in a close reading, a concise biographical understanding of the author's own Catholic faith is helpful for any reader of his works. The ambiguity of strictly doctrinal Catholicism in Greene's novels was reflected in the moral ambiguity of his personal life. Greene was certainly no saint; baptized into the Catholic church as a young man, he readily admitted that he only first became interested in Christianity in order to persuade his devout girlfriend to marry him (Greene *A Sort* 165). Even after this seduction, Greene later adopted a mistress, frequented prostitutes, and eventually cheated on both his wife and first mistress with yet a second mistress (Gorra xiv). Greene, never finding satisfaction in his many lovers, always feared their dissatisfaction with

him, entangling him in inescapable webs of lies and insecurities (Sherry 234). Throughout his life, he consistently struggled with alcoholism, drugs, and depression, and at regular intervals played dangerous games of near-suicide.

Greene's personal life, however, betrays a deep struggle with the God he barely believed in. Though he might have first explored religion in order to marry a Catholic girl, it gripped his heart strangely. In his autobiography, Greene admits that after several conversations with a local priest, he was confronted by a presence he never thought existed: "It was quite a while before I realized that my first impression was totally false and that I was facing the challenge of an inexplicable goodness" (*A Sort* 166). Though he did not expect to be in danger of conversion, though he "fought and fought hard" (*A Sort* 167), he found himself at "the limit of the land and there the sea waited...now the land had given way under my feet and I was afraid of where the tide would take me" (*A Sort* 169). This tide continued sweeping him toward God, in both his novels and his life, regardless of how hard he swam back toward shore.

Greene's doubt and guilt, this struggle against the tide, provides the most compelling evidence of his inability to shake the conversion he so flippantly approached. This can be seen in an incident recorded by Norman Sherry when Greene rejected an invitation to meet a famous Catholic priest:

Pio invited Greene to meet him privately, but although he longed to do so, he refused: "I didn't want to change my life by meeting a saint, I felt that there was a good chance that he was one. He had a great peace about him." Greene was afraid of losing his lover; the vow of chastity was one he could not keep. But there was also the difficulty of what would happen to faith if doubt were removed. (257)



Greene wanted to adore the symbol of his religion, the living saint, from a distance, but not get so close as to be too greatly influenced and motivated to give up sinning. Indeed, maintaining this contradiction, this “doubt,” seemed to be essential to Greene’s faith, binding him closer rather than pushing him away from Christianity. In another demonstration, Greene wrote the following words to his mistress Catherine after attending church with Vivien, his wife: “It’s odd how little I get out of Mass except when you’re around. I’m a much better Catholic in mortal sin! Or at least I’m more aware of it” (Sherry 257). Sin, particularly his own, gave Greene evidence of the truth of the Christian worldview of the fallen nature of humanity. According to Francois Mauriac, this defined Greene’s literary as well as his personal world, where “there is corrupted nature and omnipotent Grace; there is poverty-stricken man who is nothing, even in evil, and there is mysterious love which lays hold upon him in the thick of his ridiculous misery and absurd shame” (76). This dark outlook seemed to convince Greene of the rest of his Catholic beliefs, while ironically condemning him with his own evidence. In a word, Greene was conflicted. As recorded by Sherry, the family priest came to a similar conclusion about the troubled author in a letter to Vivien: “Priests surely often meet the enigma of the co-existence of *seeming contradictories in one man*—of evident innermost righteousness with the apparent committing of mortal sins” (298). Whether he was an inwardly righteous man outwardly sinning, or a stubborn sinner continually being called to righteousness, Greene dealt with the complications of human desires and religious belief throughout endless permutations of guilt and pleasure, depression and joy, love and hate.

While a few critics, most notably Michael Sheldon, see Greene’s apparently shallow religious personal life as evidence against any theories about serious religious themes in his novels, they ignore this continuing struggle with God that regularly appears throughout Greene’s

life. Also commonly overlooked is the truth that even a sinner may see the world, especially a world of fiction of his or her own creation, through the perspective of a religious faith, if only to evaluate the implications of that faith. Reviewer Ian Gregor insists that critics dismissing religious themes in Greene's work because of the author's own superficial faith "fail to distinguish between theology and theology-in-fiction, between 'views' and 'the use of views' as artistic material" (110). Bosco makes a similar observation when he asserts that "Greene's religious imagination finds in Catholicism a perspective, a place to stand, and in doing so, a place to reflect on and critique the world" ("From the Power" 27).

The impression given to a reader of Greene's own words on the topic of religion in his fiction is one of unwillingness to be defined or pinned down by any simple definition; he wished above all to remain an enigma. When labeled as a Catholic writer, he insisted that he was "not a Catholic writer but a writer who happens to be Catholic" (*Ways* 77). On the other hand, he also rejected the notion that his dark settings were representative of a pessimistic modern perspective, rather insisting that they simply represented what he saw of the world: "Some critics have referred to a strange violent 'seedy' region of the mind... which they call Greenland, and I have sometimes wondered whether they go round the world blinkered" (*Ways* 80). Throughout his writings, letters, and interviews, Greene expressed the desire for his fiction to be taken at face value, neither too distanced from his experiences as an author nor equivalent with the entirety of his personal views. It seemed that Greene wanted the freedom to analyze his experience of the world through fiction without feeling trapped within an unproblematic conclusion. Fiction and religion were places for him to work out his questions, not to find solid answers. In the introduction to his first autobiography, Greene explains his "motive for recording these scraps of

the past”: “It is much the same motive that has made me a novelist: a desire to reduce a chaos of experience to some sort of order, and a hungry curiosity” (*A Sort* 12).

Greene’s Catholicism did not contradict his novelistic urges. Rather, Christianity provided a point of view from which he could examine the world and evaluate its paradoxes. As Bosco explains, religion gave Greene a different but still realistic way to approach the problems of existence with which he was concerned: “The preoccupations of his religious imagination are illustrative of the problems and preoccupations which have formed the consciousness of much of the twentieth century, and his Catholic vision is always in dialogue with the cultural and political world in which he finds himself” (“From the Power” 56). As for his characters, they are realistic modern people through whom Greene evaluates the consequences of faith:

Greene turned to Catholic characters because he wanted ‘to examine more closely the effect of faith on action.’ Greene believed that for writing to have any depth, it had to be based on a view of the human person as supernatural being, brought to that moment when God confronts the person and grace encounters free will. (Bosco *Catholic Imagination* 17)

In other words, religious thought did not require that Greene ignore the subjects discussed by other modern novelists; rather, it provided him with a different way to approach the same issues. In the same way, Philip Stratford sees Greene’s engagement with Christianity “as the consolidation of an attitude which was at the very basis of his vocation as a novelist,” a “theological pattern that could at the same time realistically accommodate his intuitive sense of evil and effectively counterbalance it with powerful symbols for the good” (177).

Greene’s writing, then, reveals a continuing wrestling with God at which his personal life perhaps only hints. Patrick Query argues the same:

If behavior is also belief, then surely *writing* is behavior and betrays at least as much of the substance of a writer's belief as whatever he might publicly 'formulate and subscribe to.' Greene, it seems to me, has internalized Catholicism. He writes, in other words, like a Catholic—not only because he writes about priests, holy water, sin and confession, but because his artistic apparatus, his means of perceiving and rendering the world, is Catholic, or, more specifically, sacramental. (176-177)

Graham Greene's worldview in his fiction, in other words, remains distinctively Catholic, whether on the level of personal belief or simply as an exploration of such a worldview within fiction. Both could be argued, but the fact remains clear regardless: Greene's life and novels were shaped by Catholicism. Willingly or unwillingly, with belief or disbelief, Greene could not shake his fascination with this alternative way of viewing the world. Therefore, it seems important that one analyze how this religious sense plays a part in his novels.

Whereas critics such as Philip Stratford, Roger Sharrock, R.H. Miller, K.C. Joseph Kurismootil, R.W.B. Lewis, and Michael Brennan provide broad overviews of religious themes in Greene's Catholic novels, this analysis will seek to go beyond simply showing evidence of Catholic influence by evaluating the functioning of a specific, though central, point of doctrine. This will also be distinct from the more theological and historical focus of Mark Bosco and the sacramental focus of Patrick Query; rather than examining how Greene's novels demonstrate orthodoxy or shifts in Catholic thought, this analysis will remain focused on the narratives themselves and how the doctrine of the Incarnation functions within those narratives. So while these critics will often be quoted where they provide insight into the themes discussed, this analysis will seek to go deeper than previous evaluations, arguing that religious themes are not peripheral but rather central to an in-depth understanding of Greene's Catholic novels. Rather

than summarizing the Catholic influence or determining orthodoxy, this discussion will demonstrate the vital importance of the Incarnation to the shaping of Graham Greene's narrative worlds.

### **III. Hell and Heaven in *Brighton Rock***

Of all of Graham Greene's Catholic novels, *Brighton Rock* presents the most allegorical, and yet least overt, evidence of an incarnational theme. Theological ideas find embodiment in the characters, while the language itself contains only a few references to the actual sacraments. In the first of his Catholic novels, Greene "scarcely leave[s] the ground of fallen nature, indicating only by intimation the presence and counterbalancing action of Grace" (Stratford 182). But grace is there, peeking through among the shadows. A close look at the story reveals that embodied grace, the center of incarnational theology, does have a presence within the dark world of Brighton. As the first publication of this stage in his career, the novel demonstrates the beginnings of Greene's sacramental expression of the theology of the Incarnation within his fiction.

Difficulty in seeing the theme of the Incarnation within the novel primarily results simply from the struggle to see any grace at all in the Brighton that Greene has crafted. In the words of Roger Sharrock, in *Brighton Rock* "the intimations of mercy intrude only slightly into a world inexorably oriented towards hell" (87). One would expect Brighton, a popular seaside resort, to be a cheerful setting; Greene, however, presents his readers with a place of hedonistic escape, the guise of which only barely covers the seedy underbelly of organized crime. Sharrock describes Greene's Brighton as a sort of limbo where "dreamers are trying to escape from themselves, just as the stalls and ice-cream parlours and the bright colours of the racecourse disguise the greed and crime which flourish underneath the surface. Thus the faithful recording of the details of the

bright surface world ends by emphasizing the brittleness and deceptiveness of appearances” (85). The reader is made to feel, like the soon-to-be-murdered newspaper reporter Hale, that “anybody could tell he didn’t belong” (Greene *Brighton* 3); conscious of his impending death, neither the reader nor Hale can “belong to the early summer sun” (3) of the vacation town. From the famous first line (“Hale knew, before he had been in Brighton three hours, that they meant to murder him” [3]), readers already see the reality of hell attempting to hide behind a paltry sort of heaven. In Brighton, Greene “used the criminal underworld as a metaphor for the fallen world. It is a world characterized by violence, treachery and brutality, a world on the verge of war” (Stratford 189). As Sharrock puts it, Greene reveals the “ugly and dangerous Brighton under the coffee-table surface, the skull beneath the skin” (79). The physical reality of Brighton contains the spiritual reality of hell, inseparable from each other, a sort of demonic incarnation.

Pinkie Brown is the perfect representative of this hell. Cold, calloused, and calculating, he stalks and strangles Hale with no remorse and only a vague reference to revenge as his reason. Pinkie is not a mindless killer, however; indeed, his diabolical evil has been shaped by his Roman Catholic beliefs in the realities of heaven and hell, of spiritual truths connected to the physical world around him, “the ravaged and disputed territory between the two eternities” (Greene *Brighton* 151). He believes in hell because he is Catholic, and he is Catholic because his experience has taught him that hell exists on earth; he scoffs at unbelief in a conversation with Rose about religion: “‘Of course it’s true,’ the Boy said. ‘What else could there be?’ ... ‘it’s the only thing that fits. These atheists, they don’t know nothing. Of course there’s Hell. Flames and damnation’” (55). When it comes to the existence of heaven, however, he can only give a doubtful maybe. The reality of hell has surrounded him for the entirety of his short life, but he denies ever glimpsing heaven, and therefore refuses to assert its existence, though he still longs

for it: “He tried in a half-hearted way to picture ‘peace’—his eyes closed and behind the lids he saw a grey darkness going on and on without end, a country of which he hadn’t seen as much as a picture postcard, a place far stranger than the Grand Canyon or the Taj Mahal” (163). Through Pinkie’s defining beliefs, then, Greene already lays a foundation for demonstrating the inseparable tie between the physical and the spiritual, the basis for the possibility of God’s incarnated grace; for Pinkie, the spiritual idea of hell rings true because he can observe hell in the physical reality of his existence. In another scene, he reasons that “he wasn’t made for peace, he couldn’t believe in it. Heaven was a word: hell was something he could trust. A brain was only capable of what it could conceive, and it couldn’t conceive what it had never experienced” (248). He “couldn’t picture any eternity except in terms of pain” (102). The physical world has taught Pinkie spiritual truths, and spiritual ideas have confirmed what he knows of the physical world.

Pinkie’s murders, therefore, constitute a sort of reverse sacramentalism: he confirms and recreates his spiritual beliefs in his physical actions. Instead of the body and blood of the Eucharist imparting grace, the blood of Pinkie’s victims imparts damnation, a condemnation which Pinkie recognizes and revels in. He is the incarnated Satan, as Greene’s choice of description echoes: “He trailed the clouds of his own glory after him: hell lay about him in his infancy. He was ready for more deaths” (Greene *Brighton* 79). Indeed, Pinkie “demonstrates Catholic Christianity as though in a photo negative: all the contours and qualities of the original visible and in proper relation, only with their values in reverse” (Query 179). He is a fully spiritually embodied character, though his spirituality is diabolical. In this way, though incarnated grace might be difficult to see, Pinkie as the representative of incarnated sin is easy to recognize.

In direct contrast to Pinkie is the character of Ida Arnold. Intent on solving the murder of a man she has only known for a few superficial hours, Ida sees herself as the arbiter of societal justice, enforcer of the rule of “an eye for an eye” (Greene *Brighton* 36). As opposed to Pinkie, she rejects an understanding of the world as containing spiritual warfare between good and evil; “she didn’t believe in heaven or hell, only in ghosts, ouija boards, tables which rapped and little inept voices speaking plaintively of flowers” (35). Her sense of spirituality has nothing to do with the way in which she lives her life, which as she sees it is no more than “only fun after all” (158). This is the antithesis of Pinkie’s Catholic perspective of the spiritual significance of the physical world. As Sharrock summarizes, “For Ida death and life do apply and are distinct categories because there is no eternity in which they may become continuous, only the clear limited sense of a present world in which human beings enjoy that life, pursue happiness, and postpone that death” (83), whereas Pinkie understands living and dying in the light of eternal significance of action. Where Pinkie sees himself as isolated from the falsely cheerful brightness of Brighton, Ida fits right in: “there was no place in the world where she felt a stranger. She circulated the dregs of the cheap port in her glass and remarked to no one in particular, ‘It’s a good life.’...Only the darkness in which the Boy walked...was alien to her; she had no pity for something she didn’t understand” (Greene *Brighton* 76). Unlike Pinkie’s continual consciousness of damnation, she engages in casual sexual encounters with the self-assurance that “it did no one any harm, it was just human nature, no one could call her really bad...She knew what was right and what was wrong. God didn’t mind a bit of human nature” (164). Her carefree, good enough “good life” contrasts jarringly with Pinkie’s reality of sin and hell, and with a view into the dark side of Brighton, the reader understands from the author that Pinkie is the one who is closer to the truth, however pessimistic that truth may be.



Ida, then, represents an opposite to Pinkie not as “good” in the same way that Pinkie represents “evil”; rather, Ida embodies a worldview opposed to the belief of Pinkie in spiritual realities. In the world of Brighton, then, one can see what R.W.B. Lewis notes as “two kinds or levels of reality: a relation between incommensurable and hostile forces; between incompatible worlds; between the moral world of right and wrong, to which Ida constantly and confidently appeals, and the theological world of good and evil inhabited by Pinkie” (54). Pinkie most closely embodies Catholic spiritual thought, while Ida represents the blithe materialism of modern atheism, with both perspectives interacting within the world of physical reality. In this way, both characters present incarnated visions of their respective worldviews, pointing to Greene’s continual emphasis on the bodily importance of spiritual ideas.

If any character embodies the possibility of spiritual good versus Pinkie’s spiritual evil, it is Rose. The narrative constantly reiterates her “innocence,” a term used to communicate not her ignorance of evil but her lack of participation in it. Indeed, she lives within and is fully aware of the same hell as Pinkie; both Catholics raised in poverty, they agree wholeheartedly concerning the inherent brokenness of the world. Indeed, K.C. Joseph Kurismmootil argues that Rose’s similar background highlights Pinkie’s spiritual condition in contrast with her own, keeping the reader from determining that Pinkie is only evil as a result of his surroundings: “Indeed, Brighton has contributed to the viciousness; but we must never forget that the same soil has also nurtured goodness, Rose...Dirt and ugliness are the common heritage between them. Yet all this had such diverse effects upon the two. It confirmed Pinkie in his cynicism and he has become a sadist. Rose on the other hand has only grown in compassion” (44, 47). Sharrock agrees that “Pinkie bears the scars of his stunted upbringing in Nelson Place but that is never used as a simple excuse for his conduct” (86). Rose, then, demonstrates that Pinkie’s evil is not the only possible

reaction to acknowledgment of an evil world; though they share the same perspective, their actions are diametrically opposed, placing Pinkie's evil firmly within the scope of human choice and free will rather than spiritual determinism.

Rose's goodness is most characterized by her loving commitment to Pinkie despite his treatment of her. While this may seem to support a conception of her as simply ignorant, both the reader and Pinkie are shocked out of their impression of her stupidity when they learn that she agrees to marry Pinkie even knowing about his murders (Greene *Brighton* 202). When he discovers the truth, Pinkie points out the irony of her complicity in his evil: "'There's not a pin to choose between us.' She looked up with childish devoted eyes and swore solemnly, 'Not a pin.'" (202). This is her goodness: childish devotion, even when Pinkie inflicts pain. This paradoxical pairing of good and evil in the relationship of Rose and Pinkie highlights the allegiance of their worldviews against that of Ida Arnold. Even if Pinkie is evil and Rose is good, they have in common their belief in hell and heaven and their confidence in the ultimate importance of physical actions, as opposed to Ida's empty confidence in "fun" and "fair play." As Kurismmootil aptly puts it, "An unusual aligning of forces, this. The very good and the very bad fight on the same side, but there is no fraternizing between either and the mediocre" (41). Indeed, Rose continually resists Ida's attempts to rescue her from Pinkie, confident in Ida's ignorance of anything that matters, ignorance of truth that only a belief in heaven and hell can provide.

Through allegorical connections of Pinkie with evil, Ida with empty materialism, and Rose with goodness, then, Greene creates a world in which spiritual realities have lasting significance and influence in the sphere of physical reality. Indeed, in *Brighton Rock* spiritual and physical are inseparable in the persons of the main characters. Through their allegorical representations, the characters present the argument that it is better to be aligned with the hell of

Pinkie than the nothingness of Ida. In this perspective, those who ignore the spiritual implications of the physical world live in ignorance, while those who believe in and live with consciousness of spiritual realities, whether heaven or hell, are closest to the truth. Even Pinkie with his hatred is closer to the goodness of Rose than Ida could ever be: “Before the clear diamond of their deeper perception, Ida’s moralism is but a bauble... Even to acknowledge the spiritual absolutes is to come a step nearer to freedom” (Kurismmootil 48). To live in the knowledge that physical actions have spiritual significance, that bodies matter, that both heaven and hell are at one’s fingertips, not distant abstractions—this is Greene’s incarnational point of view, the view which he embodies in his characters.

The allegorical nature of *Brighton Rock* also reveals another aspect of Greene’s worldview as influenced by the theology of the Incarnation, a theme that comes to be fully developed in his later novels: it is the worst of sinners who is closest to God. As has already been hinted, Greene demonstrates that the evil of Pinkie is ironically more closely aligned with the good of Rose than the atheistic materialism of Ida because of Pinkie’s recognition of the existence of spiritual realities. Pinkie and Rose are both soldiers of eternity, if on different sides: “They faced each other as it were from opposing territories, but like troops at Christmas time they fraternized” (Greene *Brighton* 151). Having spiritual perspectives in common, “they understood each other. She used terms common to heaven and hell” (183). Even beyond this association, however, several instances in the text emphasize how Pinkie’s love of causing suffering and Rose’s loving endurance of suffering make them partners in their proximity to the embodied, suffering grace offered by Christ. For example, Pinkie expresses “a sense of needing her” (183), a consciousness that “she was good... and he was damned: they were made for each other” (135). The idea even manages to inspire in Pinkie a sort of sexual desire: “He was moved

by a kind of sensuality: the coupling of good and evil” (194). As Kurismmootil summarizes, “In Greene’s fictional world, love and hate are not antithetic. Strangely they appear even as bed fellows” (39).

In their relationship, then, Rose and Pinkie demonstrate the paradox that “good or evil lived in the same country, spoke the same language, came together like old friends, feeling the same completion, touching hands beside the iron bedstead” (Greene *Brighton* 135). This paradoxical language is reminiscent of the presence of Jesus with sinners in the texts of the Gospels; when challenged by the Pharisees for consorting with “sinners and tax collectors,” Christ insists that “It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick”: “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matthew 9:11-21, NIV). In the allegorical marriage of innocence and sin represented by Rose and Pinkie, the reader is confronted with an image of the same sort of paradoxical association embodied by Christ in his mercy toward the unrighteous.

Rose’s unconditional love of Pinkie certainly identifies her with Christ, and gives her Christ-like power as a conduit of God’s grace, profoundly impacting Pinkie in a similar way to the music that often brings him to unbidden tears:

She said gently, ‘I don’t care what you’ve done’ ... He was speechless; and some knowledge of the astuteness of her simplicity, the long experience of her sixteen years, the possible depths of her fidelity touched him like cheap music, as the light shifted from cheek-bone to cheek-bone and across the wall, as the gears ground outside. He said, ‘What do you mean? I’ve done nothing.’ (121)

Through Rose as the embodiment of Christ’s love for Pinkie, therefore, one may see God’s incarnated grace to begin to affect this boy murderer. Rose becomes “the chief vehicle of grace

against the world,” while Pinkie “function[s] as the worst of sinners who is therefore the most interesting to God” (Sharrock 90). Critic Michael G. Brennan sees Rose’s love as an example of “the often mundane guises of good and evil and the ineffable nature of Divine Mercy” within Greene’s novels (48). Like Christ coming not “to call the righteous, but sinners,” Rose’s love is miraculous because she loves Pinkie in the depths of his evil. Ironically, because “Rose aspires to damnation not through an embracing of evil but through the sheer intensity of her love for Pinkie” (Brennan 55), she is as paradoxically “doomed to salvation...as Pinkie is to damnation” (Lewis 55), as even her desire to be damned with Pinkie through sex and suicide reveal her unconditional love. And for Pinkie, as Kurismmootil surmises, “Inasmuch as he has established a relationship with Rose, the implication is that Pinkie’s viciousness is not the final word” (48). Rose and Pinkie, then, become the means through which Greene strongly presents two implications of the doctrine of the Incarnation: that grace is closest to the greatest sinner, and that God’s grace can be communicated through human weakness. As Christ took on weak human flesh to love even the lowest of sinners, Rose’s ordinary human love has the potential to influence the hardened heart of Pinkie.

This incarnational idea of the embodiment of God’s love even through fallen human relationships continues strongly even beyond the allegorical level, found primarily in the narrative’s presentation of sexual relationships. Pinkie, like many of Greene’s characters, finds himself spiritually hounded by the physical presence of sex. At first, his sexuality presents a confusing paradox for the reader: though he knowingly pursues sin in the form of murder, Pinkie is terrified by the idea of intercourse. One would assume that such a diabolical figure would engage in all forms of vice as a part of his self-damnation; however, Pinkie adamantly refuses the alcohol and sexual experiences continually offered by his gang members. In the words of

Patrick Query, “[Greene] presents a world where to sleep with someone is either a foul bodily exercise...or a mortal sin (according to Rose), but it is never, except for Ida or the less single-minded members of Pinkie’s gang, a matter of indifference” (182). Query also notes that “even though the coupling of Rose and Pinkie is anything but wholesome, the novel presents it as somehow redeemed because it is undertaken in full awareness of the deeper realities of good and evil. If one thing is clear, it is that both Rose and Pinkie prefer damnation to middle-class indifference, and that neither understands sex in popular humanistic terms” (183). In other words, Pinkie cannot accept sex as simply a physical action for fun or “a good time” as Ida does; as with everything, he can only think of sex in terms of good and evil, heaven and hell, sin and damnation. As evidence, both Rose and Pinkie see their marriage outside of the church as “mortal sin” (Greene *Brighton* 183), though even most conservative Catholics would not so roundly condemn their registrar’s office wedding as sinful. Regardless, they cling to the idea of their action as sin because of their belief in the importance of sacrament; by not getting married before a priest at the altar, before God, their marriage is a sham and their sex unholy. Both Rose and Pinkie’s views of sex have been shaped by the incarnational theology of Catholicism, imbuing physical action with spiritual significance. In this worldview, sex is a matter of eternal importance.

Pinkie in particular expresses a deep hatred of sex “for fun,” the sort of physical relationships so casually engaged by characters like Ida, who see sex as their “reward” for living and being basically good (Greene *Brighton* 36). He rejects the idea that sex could offer him anything worth the risk of vulnerability: “He knew everything, he had watched every detail of the act of sex, you couldn’t deceive him with lovely words, there was nothing to be excited about, no gain to recompense you for what you lost” (97). Pinkie’s reaction toward sex goes

deeper than simply dismissing it as a pursuit of the blind materialist world, however. At a vulnerable moment, angry with one of his men for implying he does not understand the “rules” of “bouncing and ploughing,” Pinkie admits that his fear of the act once made him consider the priesthood: “‘What’s wrong with being a priest?’ the Boy asked. ‘They know what’s what. They keep away—‘ his whole mouth and jaw loosened: he might have been going to weep: he beat out wildly with his hands towards the window” (181). Pinkie admits to the attraction of the priesthood not only for its recognition of the spiritual significance of physical action, but also for its rejection of that which he cannot even stand to name. Pinkie claims to hate sex because he associates it with the world of Ida, the world of his gang members, the world of “fun...the game” (182), but his physical and mental recoiling from even the thought of sex demonstrate more than just hate and anger. His irrational reactions reveal a deep subconscious fear.

Pinkie’s language, in being unable to even name sex and instead calling it only “the horror,” reveals his view of any sexual contact as a form of rape, as a potential violation of the self he so carefully controls. As a Catholic who believes in the incarnational spiritual significance of physical action, Pinkie recognizes sex for what it is: just the mechanics of “ploughing,” but imbued with spiritual significance. He knows that sexual desire gives Rose a sort of “power” over him, offering potential for the influence of her goodness (120). As Kurismmootil argues, Pinkie’s sexual desire for Rose often takes the form of “sullen disgust, as if she might defile him or deprive him of something very precious and his own” (38). Pinkie fears sex because, though he does not express as much, he fears the threat it represents to his control over his spiritual fate, his self-condemnation. It also represents something of the heaven he insists does not exist, the possibility of physical enjoyment he can never have because of his consciousness of hell, a sentiment that is revealed by his remembrance of listening to his parents’

intercourse: “It was Saturday night. His father panted like a man at the end of the race and his mother made a horrifying sound of pleasurable pain. He was filled with hatred, disgust, loneliness: he was completely abandoned: he had no share in their thoughts—for the space of a few minutes he was dead, he was like a soul in purgatory watching the shameless act of a beloved person” (203). Pinkie is in purgatory: haunted by the constant presence of hell, he is unable to enjoy life or connect to another person even in a physical way. Even when he experiences desire, he is terrified of the vulnerability, exposure, and potential for rejection the fulfillment of that desire would require.

As his actual sexual relationship with Rose begins to unfold, Pinkie’s fear and hatred of sex is not as paradoxical in light of his evil as it is helpful in understanding the author’s incarnational imagination; through Pinkie and Rose, Greene presents the idea that physical connection with another person through sexual intercourse provides a means through which grace might break into embodied reality. Pinkie’s fears surrounding sex seem justified when one observes the possibilities for spiritual change that his physical union with Rose provides. For one, he recognizes that it ties him to another person for life, both out of the necessity of keeping her from giving evidence against him and because of the spiritual significance of their physical bond: “The truth came home to him with horror that he had got to keep her love for a lifetime; he would never be able to discard her. If he climbed he had to take Nelson Place with him like a visible scar; the registry office marriage was as irrevocable as a sacrament. Only death could ever set him free” (Greene *Brighton* 203). Pinkie finds himself tied by a sacrament into relationship with another person, which means he can never again be alone in his isolated damnation; his fear betrays his recognition that this has created a crack in his demonic armor through which grace might penetrate.



And it does penetrate, if not in a fully redemptive way. Pinkie describes his taking of Rose's virginity as a form of communion, using notably sacramental language as he strives for "getting what savour there was out of innocence, trying to taste God in the mouth" (Greene *Brighton* 198). Revealingly, this aligns the sex act with a sort of communion; though both Pinkie and Rose see it as a sort of unholy Eucharist, they still associate it with the Eucharist. Though they see it as an unholy sacrament, the effect on Pinkie reveals that this communion has stirred in him a change from his usual hardened hellishness. Afterward, he experiences "a faint feeling of tenderness...for his partner in the act" (198). Later in the car on his way to have Rose kill herself, Pinkie "found that he remembered it all without repulsion; he had a sense that somewhere, like a beggar outside a shuttered house, tenderness stirred, but he was bound in a habit of hate" (251). Even though he is trapped in the evil he has created, he can still feel the presence of something outside himself, a force trying to penetrate his defenses. Connecting these stirrings with Rose, he looks forward to the freedom of damnation when she is dead: "No more human contacts, other people's emotions washing at the brain—he would be free again: nothing to think about but himself" (251).

The reader sees what Pinkie has been afraid of all along: the connection with another person offering the potential for love and compassion, and therefore, grace. Though he is loath to admit it, Pinkie's relationship with Rose has indeed created a crack in his armor where heaven has started to break into hell. It is significant, then, that the strongest image of Pinkie being pursued by the spiritual force of grace also happens during this fateful drive with Rose while contemplating their intercourse:

It was true—he hadn't hated her; he hadn't even hated the act. There had been a kind of pleasure, a kind of pride, a kind of—something else...An enormous emotion beat on him;

it was like something trying to get in; the pressure of gigantic wings against the glass...If the glass broke, if the beast—whatever it was—got in, God knows what it would do. He had a sense of huge havoc—the confession, the penance and the sacrament—and awful distraction, and he drove blind into the rain. (261)

More than just a stirring, here sex has opened the door for “the pressure of gigantic wings” to beat against the walls of Pinkie’s self-made hell. Kurismmootil explains, “The sexual union mediated for the boy something so fine he cannot name it...Transcendence is a frightening possibility. It signifies new demands made on his person” (49). Pinkie’s former fears of sex have been justified. Such a physical act as sexual communion with Rose has indeed created the possibility of his spiritual change. Grace has been incarnated even in the loveless intercourse of a state marriage, whose participants even interpreted the act as mortal sin. In their intercourse, God finds a way to begin beating against Pinkie’s hardened soul; through the barest possible instance of incarnated grace, the Pursuer has begun to hound the sinner.

As is evident, then, sex presents an important key to understanding Greene’s incarnational imagination. Though categorized as holy or unholy according to church views on marriage and seemingly only physical in motivation and action, even sex can become a sacrament, a way for spiritual truth to break into the world of embodied reality. Pinkie, through his fear, expresses a subconscious understanding of this sacramental aspect; he resists desire not just because sex is a part of “the game,” but also because he knows that even the barest physical connection with another person can have significant spiritual effects. Sex, as a connection with another human being, has the potential to incarnate the possibility of connection with God. In the words of Roger Sharrock,

While apparently uncompromising in his depiction of a wholly fallen world and an infinite gulf between corruption and divine grace he [Greene] shows Pinkie, through Rose, learning the beginnings of physical gentleness as a mode of release from his self-absorbed hatred. The Jansenist horror of the body present not only in Pinkie's consciousness but throughout the imagery of the narrative is offset by the daring and contradictory suggestion of redemption through the mystery of the flesh. (91)

This is the reality of the Incarnation within the narrative of *Brighton Rock*: “redemption through the mystery of the flesh.” Pinkie has only known hell, but Rose's love presents an opportunity for him to see something of heaven. He resists till the end, afraid of the “huge havoc” such incarnated grace and love would cause in his perfectly controlled, perfectly damned isolation, but grace continually hounds him nonetheless.

So what is one to make of the end of the novel in light of the narrative's incarnational implications? Many critics have debated whether or not Pinkie is “saved” in his final moments, if the love of Rose might have provided him with some sort of salvation. The words of the priest to Rose concerning Pinkie's eternal fate echo the theological ideas brought up by the rest of the novel: “‘Corruptio optimi est pessima.’ . . . a Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone. I think perhaps—because we believe in Him—we are more in touch with the devil than other people” (Greene *Brighton* 268). As discussed previously, the doctrine of the Incarnation places the grace of God closest to those who need it most, a difficult paradox which may cause a reader of Greene's novels to agree with the priest in asserting “‘the . . . appalling . . . strangeness of the mercy of God’” (268). But as the priest also asserts, knowledge of spiritual realities also cause one to be “more in touch with the devil,” as Pinkie undoubtedly demonstrates.

An answer to the question may be found in the sort of dress rehearsal to Pinkie's death found earlier in the novel: his near encounter with eternity during a fight with rival gang members at the race track. Up to this point, Pinkie believes in the possibility of being "saved between the stirrup and the ground" despite his sinful life. He believes in the possibility of grace through repentance in the last moments before dying. But in the actual experience of fleeing for his life, Pinkie is faced with his own pathetic inability to make himself change so drastically so quickly:

He wept as he ran, lame in one leg from the kick, he even tried to pray. You could be saved between the stirrup and the ground, but you couldn't be saved if you didn't repent and he hadn't time, scrambling down the chalk down, to feel the least remorse...his thoughts would carry him no further than the corner where his pursuers might reappear: he discovered that he hadn't the energy to repent...it wasn't eternity he thought about but his own humiliation. (115)

The narrative implies that Pinkie cannot be eternally saved through the abstract idea of repentance right before death; grace is too immaterial, danger too material, and evil too habitual for him to suddenly change in this moment of desperation. In his own words, Pinkie later asserts that salvation has less to do with superficial repentance than with mental, even bodily, identity with grace: "It's not what you do,' the Boy said, 'it's what you think.' He boasted. 'It's in the blood. Perhaps when they christened me, the holy water didn't take. I never howled the devil out'" (136). He realizes that if he has not accepted grace in life, he will certainly not have the strength to accept it at his death. The only real opportunity of possible salvation for Pinkie comes through the incarnated physicality of Rose's sacrificial love. As demonstrated previously, only in his moments of growing fondness for Rose does Pinkie experience the pressure of grace

attempting to break down his habit of damned isolation, and always, he resists that external force of change. Pinkie continually chooses the safety of his hatred and evil over the potential grace and yet definite exposure required by loving Rose. Therefore, no matter the ambiguous words of the priest at the end, it remains evident through Pinkie's last actions of hatred toward Rose that he stands firmly within the self-damnation he has chosen. As R.W.B. Lewis argues,

If one can be sure of anything in the real world or in Greene's world, Pinkie Brown is damned—it is his special mode of triumph... The implied denouement in *Brighton Rock* is as disagreeable as anything in modern fiction. But *Brighton Rock* is deliberately pitiless, and partly because it aims, by moving beyond human pity, to evoke the far faint light of an incomprehensible divine mercy. (52-53)

In other words, Pinkie surely condemns himself, but his damnation in no way takes away from his potential for grace demonstrated throughout the novel; rather, his death is most tragic in that the reader sees his opportunities to obtain mercy and his continual refusal to do so. In Michael Sheldon's estimation, "The leap into the abyss is... his final flight from God" (201). In throwing the acid in an attempt to destroy Rose, Pinkie tragically destroys himself and his chance of salvation.

All the same, the priest's words of comfort to Rose highlight the depth of the theological implications brought to the surface by the novel's incarnational themes. Rose's visit to the confessional is, as Sharrock aptly puts it, the distillation of the "shocking juxtaposition of hopelessness and problematic hope" presented allegorically in the rest of the narrative (98). Greene obviously desired to complicate traditional black-and-white views of the hope of salvation; this is apparent enough in the character of Rose, who, though the poor and uneducated underage wife of a murderer, is the one character who most clearly demonstrates the selfless love

of Christ. In his own words, Greene describes Pinkie as the result of his desire “to make a character...who everyone would have said was destined to be damned, and yet leave the reader wondering if he couldn’t be saved after all” (Stratford 193). While Pinkie most likely remains damned, then, Greene still manages to inspire thought and serious questioning surrounding theological ideas, effectively breaking the reader out of any uncomplicated view of the working of God’s mercy. In the ambiguity, the reader is given an incarnational vision of the “sinner in reach of salvation...the prodigal, the social outcast, the abnormal character, to force home the principle that Christ came to save ‘that which was lost’” (Stratford 193).

In *Brighton Rock*, then, one can see Greene begin to toy with the implications of incarnated grace, but not so directly as to be able to break away from the allegorical figures with which he has identified his characters. Pinkie as incarnated evil cannot in the end break out of his self-damned identity, though his interaction with embodied goodness in Rose hints at the possibility and complicates the allegorical narrative. Overall, the result is a story that seems to have been begun as an entertainment only be imbued with spiritual thought. It seems as if Greene originally saw the story as centering on the conflict between the spiritual knowledge of Pinkie and the empty materialism of Ida, only to find Pinkie less embattled with Ida than with the potential for change introduced by Pinkie’s interaction with Rose, or in a real sense, the character of God. Joseph Kurismmootil beautifully summarizes the presence of God in the novel as no more than “a subtle pressure, a still small voice speaking to the heart, a gentle throbbing at the depths of our self. And yet, remarkably, Greene, *has* given it a scheme. Framed within the network of reiterating allusions, the quiet pursuit is a thing alive” (50). In this first of his Catholic novels, Greene begins to write God as a character, “a thing alive.” The narrative is as

much hounded by God as Pinkie is by “gigantic wings,” all through the presence of incarnational grace.

#### IV. Depravity and God’s Image in *The Power and the Glory*

Graham Greene’s second Catholic novel, *The Power and the Glory*, represents the next stage in the narrative evolution of his incarnational imagination. The book was the result of Greene’s trip to Mexico to document persecution of the Catholic church by the socialist government, a journey first described in his non-fiction travel memoir *The Lawless Roads*. Even more than in his own familiar English streets, in Mexico Greene found a new setting for his ever-present reality of hell; he describes with brutal realism the dusty streets, the teeming mosquitoes, the threat of disease, the corrupt government, and the suspicious unfriendliness of the people. While some, such as critic Michael Shelden in his unflattering biography *Graham Greene: The Enemy Within*, interpret this negativity as bigotry and racism on Greene’s part, one can hear in the author’s descriptions of Mexico a similarity to his presentation of Brighton, an echo that reveals not so much personal hatred of a specific people but observations of yet another place where he has found the gangrenous effects of human depravity. Indeed, at his lowest point, which Shelden quotes out of context, Greene expresses an even deeper hatred for the hell of the American pop culture magazines, his only reading material after he finishes the novels he took with him, than the hell of Mexico:

I loathed Mexico—but there were times when it seemed as if there were worse places...Here there were idolatry and oppression, starvation and casual violence, but you lived under the shadow of religion—of God or the Devil. ‘Rating for Dating’—it wasn’t evil, it wasn’t anything at all, it was just the drugstore and the Coca Cola, the hamburger, the sinless graceless chromium world. (*Lawless Roads* 184)

This reflects the sentiments Greene previously expressed in *Brighton Rock*: even hell is better than pretending hell does not exist. On his return home, Greene writes again of his confrontation with this reality of a broken world: “I wondered why I had disliked Mexico so much: *this* was home. One always expects something different” (223). Hell simply looked different in Mexico than it did in England, but for Greene, hell was everywhere.

Also in contradiction to Sheldon’s perspective, Greene records a significant amount of barely concealed disgust toward his fellow tourists for their stubborn desire to not see the poverty and dirt and hell around them, for their general religion-less apathy toward the battlefield that is the world: “the old, good, pink face disclosed the endless vacancy behind...behind that pinkness and that goodness, eternal nothingness working its way through the brain” (*Lawless Roads* 37). On the other hand, he often expresses a sort of respect for the quiet way in which the people of Mexico have come to accept their hardships, either with increased faith or strong atheism, “for one can respect an atheist as one cannot respect a deist: once accept a God and reason should carry you further, but to accept nothing at all—that requires some stubbornness, some courage” (37). For Mexican Catholics he reserves his greatest compliment: “This is the atmosphere of the stigmata, and you realize suddenly that perhaps *this* is the population of heaven—these aged, painful, and ignorant faces: they are human goodness” (44). His recognition of disagreeable traits in the Mexican people falls in step with his generally pessimistic view of humanity as a whole: all suffer, both by their own fault and that of others, and suffering often brings out the worst as well as the best in sinful people. In his own words,

The world is all of a piece, of course; it is engaged everywhere in the same subterranean struggle, lying like a tiny neutral state, with whom no one ever observes his treaties,



between the two eternities of pain and—God knows the opposite of pain, not we... There is no peace anywhere where there is human life. (*Lawless Roads* 33)

If Greene refused to turn a blind eye to the dark things of the world, it is not because he saw himself as above them; he saw the worst in others because he knew the worst in himself. For Greene, hell was everywhere, and he only disdained those who refused to recognize it.

Greene carried this theme from the non-fiction memoir into the fiction of *The Power and the Glory*. Once again, as with Brighton, Greene presents his readers with hell on earth: dust, degradation, and human depravity. R.W.B. Lewis observes that “Greene often turns away from the relatively civilized to inspect human life in its cruder and more exposed conditions: in a dark corner of Brighton, the jungles and prisons of Tabasco, the coast of West Africa—all places where...there openly flourished ‘the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up’” (51-52). But it is in the midst of this hell that Greene chooses to also reveal grace; at the bottom of the pit, God can be found. As in *Brighton Rock*, then, this again forms the starting place for a discussion of Greene’s reliance on the Incarnation in the narrative world of *The Power and the Glory*: the spiritual reality of hell is embodied on earth in the suffering of physical existence. While the world of Brighton represents more of an ideological hell, with Greene focusing on blind materialism as embodied by Ida Arnold, the world of Mexico is a physical hell in the form of climate, disease, starvation, thirst, and insects as well as a psychological hell of the apathy created by such suffering. Both sides of this hell are expressed by the dentist Mr. Tench, who serves as the reader’s introduction to the setting. In the novel’s very first sentence, he ventures out “into the blazing Mexican sun and the bleaching dust,” observed by “a few vultures” looking “down from the roof with shabby indifference: he wasn’t carrion yet” (*Greene Power* 7). “Shabby indifference” has come to overwhelm Mr. Tench’s own

perspective of life. His conversation with the unnamed priest is revealing and tragic in its painful resignation:

He put his hand to his stomach and said, 'You haven't got any medicine, have you, for— oh hell. I don't know what. It's just this bloody land. You can't cure me of that. No one can.'

'You want to go home?'

'Home,' Mr. Tench said, 'my home's here. Did you see what the peso stands at in Mexico City? Four to the dollar. Four. O God. *Ora pro nobis.*'

'Are you Catholic?'

'No, no. Just an expression. I don't believe in anything like that.' He said irrelevantly, 'It's too hot anyway.' (10)

The apathetic "It's too hot anyway" of Mr. Tench sums up one spiritual reaction to the physical hell of Mexico. Succumbing to the sweltering, inescapable dullness of his situation, he is aware only of the inevitable decay of all things, as revealed in his reaction to an attractive young girl on an arriving boat: "'She's a pretty bit. Of course, in two years she'll be like all the rest. Fat and stupid'" (11). The whole world, Mexico included, "roll[s] heavily in space under its fog like a burning and abandoned ship" (29). Also, as in *Brighton Rock*, heaven seems little more than an idea because of its lack of referents in the physical world: "What is heaven? Literary phrases...became confused on his tongue: the names of precious stones: Jerusalem the Golden. But these people had never seen gold" (69). In the world of the novel, the physical Mexico is a physical and spiritual hell: miserable, soul-crushing, withering, amnesic, and eventually causing a weary apathy preventing any attempts at change or struggle. But it is not isolated in its hellishness; rather, it is representative of the whole world.

In a more literal sense, Mexico is hell in its socialist government's persecution of Christianity. Officials have sought the destruction of God by executing priests and outlawing Mass along with all other distribution of sacraments to the people. As regards access to God through confession and Eucharist, then, the people of Mexico are cut off from grace. For all practical purposes, God has no means of communication with humanity. As Greene's fascination with this persecution in both his non-fiction and fiction reveals, Mark Bosco notes, "the preoccupations of his religious imagination are illustrative of the problems and preoccupations which have formed the consciousness of much of the twentieth century, and his Catholic vision is always in dialogue with the cultural and political world in which he finds himself" ("From *The Power*" 56). For Greene, the political and spiritual situations of Mexico are inseparable. The struggles of church and state are representative of what is imagined in *Brighton Rock* as a battlefield, the embodiment of the Catholic perspective of a constant war between good and evil.

Unlike in *Brighton Rock*, however, in *The Power and the Glory* Greene moves away from presenting characters as allegorical representations of the "sides" of this war and instead makes them more human, caught in the middle between conflicting forces. In contrast with his first Catholic novel, Greene's primary concern in this book is not "the opposition of creeds, but...the inter-involvement of persons in contact with divine grace" (Sharrock 124). As in *Brighton Rock*, Philip Stratford notes, "Greene tends to oppose to Catholic heroes engaged in a spiritual struggle against the materialistic bias and lack of understanding of an atheistic world" (193), but the main characters of *The Power and the Glory* are more complex than *Brighton Rock*'s presentation of Pinkie as evil, Rose as goodness, and Ida as atheistic materialism. The police lieutenant, the story's closest representative of atheistic materialism, fights the institution he sees as the source of hell: the Catholic church. In his view, the church has created hell on earth by preaching the

idea of heaven while doing nothing to abate actual physical suffering. As R.H. Miller observes, “The lieutenant, ideologically, has a good deal in common with Pinkie Brown of *Brighton Rock* and reveals also a touch of Ida Arnold, with both his love of the world and his fuzzy belief in material progress for the Mexican people, which is posed against a strangely demonic-spiritual, indeed priestly quality” (61). By the end of the novel he also shows something of the stirrings of the grace represented by Rose.

The protagonist of the story is no less complex than its antagonist. The whiskey priest, though a representative of the church, is sinful, weak, and cowardly and very much aware of his flaws, demonstrating something of Pinkie’s self-knowledge mixed with Rose’s self-unacknowledged goodness. In Lewis’s estimation, the priest represents a figure similar to Pinkie, “the shifting and interwoven attributes of the Greenean man: a being capable of imitating both Christ and Judas; a person who is at once the pursuer and the man pursued; a creature with the splendid potentiality either of damnation or salvation” (52). In *Brighton Rock*, “Rose and Pinkie together had represented the duality of Greene’s configuration of good and evil but in this passage both moral extremes are encapsulated within a single flawed human being,” the more complicated figure of the priest (Brennan 70). Overall, whereas *Brighton Rock* presented characters allegorically as almost larger-than-life representatives of differing worldviews, the characters of *The Power and the Glory* are depicted as complex individuals caught in the middle of a spiritual war. In Greene’s first Catholic novel, the characters are the combatants; in his second, the characters are more clearly that which is being fought for by opposing spiritual forces.

Secondly, this novel also differs from the more allegorical *Brighton Rock* in that Greene introduces criticism of Catholic perspectives from within “the good side” itself through the

presentation of self-righteous religious characters. As Stratford argues, “After *Brighton Rock* with its rather overstated contrast between pagan Ida Arnold and Catholic Rose and Pinkie, he [Greene] began to introduce internal criticism. *The Power and the Glory* (1940) contains both...opposition between the agnostic police lieutenant and the priest, and criticism of the self-righteousness of the pious Catholic woman in the prison cell” (194). In other words, while in *Brighton Rock* the heroes were closely tied to their self-identification as Catholics, *The Power and the Glory* presents characters who might be within the Catholic church but are nonetheless blinded to the implications of Catholic teaching for physical reality, particularly as regards the actions of grace. Instead of remaining securely within the boundaries of Catholicism as enlightened and atheistic materialism as ignorant, in his second Catholic novel Greene presents Catholic characters who do not live within the implications of the Incarnation. It is also worth noting with Lewis that “in this novel, by a refreshing contrast with...*Brighton Rock*, the religious impulse no longer denigrates and undermines the human but serves rather to find in it or to introduce into it a kind of beauty and a kind of goodness” (60), putting Catholicism in a more critical and yet also more positive light. The overall effect is a novel in which the characters are more human and the theological workings of the narrative more clearly defined, as spiritual meanings are not so wrapped up with individual characters or with the institutional church but with the deeper currents of the narrative.

The major similarities and differences between the two novels aside, the influence of the Incarnation is evident in several themes that appeared in *Brighton Rock*, intensified and clarified in *The Power and the Glory*: the worst of sinners as closest to God’s grace, the experience of suffering as part of identifying oneself with the sufferings of Christ, and human love as intimately connected with the love of God. These ideas run bright threads through the dark world

of Greene's Mexico, demonstrating the implications created by the Incarnation for grace to break through the depths of hell and into the physical reality of human existence. In Mark Bosco's words, Greene demonstrates in *The Power and the Glory* that because of "the doctrine of the Incarnation, the body is not portrayed as at war with the soul; rather the body and the soul are consubstantial, sacred co-constituents of human life. The divine is found in the endeavors of the body, so that the spiritual life must be understood as a possible path for the soul" (54).

The influence of the Incarnation is particularly clear in Greene's allegorical storyline, with the pursuit of the priest by the lieutenant being paralleled with the priest's pursuit by God. A.A. DeVitis estimates that it is this use of "allegory that lends the events of the narrative an excitement above and beyond the simple adventure of flight and pursuit" (337). If the story were simply that of a priest running from a government officer, the narrative would be rather uninspiring, considering the weak, cowardly, rather unlikeable nature of the pursued. But this unlikeable character plodding around Mexico contains another deeper narrative. Bosco aptly summarizes the plot as

an archetypal story of pursuit and betrayal, specifically drawn in Catholic terms by making the chase motif operate on two levels. The first is the fugitive priest attempting to escape from the pursuing forces of a political state in which Catholicism is treasonable and priesthood is punishable by death, the second the discovery that the priest is even more intensely pursued by the power of God's grace. ("From *The Power*" 60)

The priest's flight from persecution mirrors his flight from an understanding of God's love, both for him and others. In the structure of the narrative itself, then, one can see Greene's reliance on the doctrine of the Incarnation: physical experience has spiritual significance, and the workings of grace take the form of events in normal human reality. The physical journey of the priest

brings about his spiritual journey from empty religious observance to sacrificial love mirroring that of Christ, endowing his ordinary human experience of suffering with eternal importance.

Within this overall incarnational structure, the main character of the priest himself embodies the theological implication of the worst of sinners being potentially closest to God. As mentioned in the previous discussion of Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*, Christ's humble embodiment of suffering humanity and his interaction with sinners has as an implication the idea that God cares most for "the sick," the spiritually broken, rather than "the healthy," or the self-righteous. The whiskey priest is certainly one of "the sick." He began life as one of the righteous, as "a happy man": "The good things of life had come to him too early—the respect of his contemporaries, a safe livelihood. The trite religious word upon the tongue, the joke to ease the way, the ready acceptance of other people's homage" (Greene *Power* 22). Through his experience of suffering as a result of persecution and recognition of his sinfulness, he learns to identify with the suffering of those he serves: "It was if he had descended by means of his sin into the human struggle" (Greene *Power* 62). The more he experiences "life without books, without contact with educated men," interacting with the people he used to be above, suffering "peel[s] away from his memory everything but the simplest outline of the mystery" (65) of the Incarnation: God's love for broken humanity. He is always aware of his sinfulness, but begins his journey in the pride of thinking that his sin is stronger than God, greater than God's mercy in its ability to prevent him from being a good servant: "One day they [his failures] would choke up, he supposed, altogether the source of grace" (60). Greene presents this pride, even in acknowledgment of sin, as a sort of self-righteousness; the priest sees himself and his actions as the source of grace, not grace working through him. As the novel continues, however, the priest is chased by "God as the Hound of Heaven...through the labyrinth of his fallen nature...."

exposing God's passionate love and mercy in the least expected of all places" (Bosco "From *The Power*" 61).

This first becomes most clear when the priest is confronted with the treachery of the ugly mestizo. In the presence of this example of the worst in humanity, a figure of Judas, the priest begins to realize the depth of the mystery of the Incarnation he has preached for so many years:

It was for this world that Christ had died; the more evil you saw and heard about you, the greater glory lay around the death. It was too easy to die for what was good or beautiful, for home or children or a civilization—it needed a God to die for the half-hearted and the corrupt. (Greene *Power* 97)

The priest sees the strange paradox of the Incarnation, that God would take on human flesh to save disgusting human flesh. The more he learns about Christ through interaction with those He came to save, the more the priest learns to love, all while realizing that nothing in him has the power to love apart from the love of God. Looking at the mestizo, he sees his own sin: "Christ had died for this man too: how could he pretend with his pride and lust and cowardice to be any more worthy of that death than the half-caste?" (99). Like Greene, in observing the suffering of others the priest feels "as if he had been permitted to look in from the outside at the population of heaven. Heaven must contain just such scared and dutiful and hunger-lined faces" (71). In Bosco's words, "the whiskey priest is the 'sinner at the heart of Christianity,' who realizes that Christ is intimately linked with every sinner" (61). As the priest interacts with the humanity Christ died to save, he understands God's love for humanity and learns to love.

This growing understanding comes to a climax in the famous prison cell scene. Caught, in a twist of dark irony, not for distributing sacraments but for carrying brandy, the priest is thrown into a cell crowded with all the disgusting smells, detritus, and depravity of humanity.



With a crazy old man leaning on his shoulder, a couple loudly having sex somewhere in the darkness, a pious woman judging his alcoholism, and the stench of the latrine bucket overflowing from an unseen corner, the priest realizes that “this place was very like the world: overcrowded with lust and crime and unhappy love, it stank to heaven; but he realized that after all it was possible to find peace there” (Greene *Power* 125). Suddenly, he is “moved by an irrational affection for the inhabitants of this prison. A phrase came to him: ‘God so loved the world...’” (127). The whiskey priest understands, if not for himself in his own sin, the grace of God that is close to the sinner. In Roger Sharrock’s summary, “The prison scene convincingly develops the underlying theme of the priest who is a separated sinner only to himself, but united to God and his suffering people in love” (121).

When the pious woman reprimands the noisy couple for their “mortal sin,” the priest chastises her for refusing to recognize God’s presence even in the ugliness of others, for believing that her sins are not as bad as theirs:

“But the ugliness...”

“Don’t believe that. It’s dangerous. Because suddenly we discover that our sins have so much beauty.”

“Beauty,” she said with disgust. “Here. In this cell. With strangers all round.”

“Such a lot of beauty. Saints talk about the beauty of suffering. Well, we are not saints, you and I. Suffering to us is just ugly. Stench and crowding and pain. *That* is beautiful in that corner—to them. It needs a lot of learning to see things with a saint’s eye: a saint gets a subtle taste for beauty and can look down on poor ignorant palates like theirs. But we can’t afford to.” (130)

One can hear Greene chastising the American tourists in *The Lawless Roads*, as well as the self-righteous Catholics who condemned his novels as heresy; through a whiskey priest in a Mexican prison cell, he reminds them that because Christ took on human flesh and suffered, human suffering has potential as a place where grace might appear, where God might show up. Indeed, the priest and therefore Greene implies that the bodily sins of the couple in the prison are not as far away from God as the sins of pride and self-righteousness and judgmentalism of the pious woman, because at least the couple is in touch with the depravity of their physical natures, therefore bringing them closer to repentance. R.H. Miller describes this moment as Greene crafting “a microcosm” of “the whisky priest’s ministry” of embodying Christ’s love for the worst of sinners (65-66). Humbled in his sinfulness, admitting to himself “‘I’m a bad priest’” (Greene *Power* 130), the whiskey priest nevertheless suffers with and loves his fellow man in a way that parallels Christ’s love for the world. As the priest discovers, “the Incarnation is revealed to characters when they discover that their sins or their suffering bring them into an analogical relationship with the suffering God in Christ” (Bosco “From *The Power*” 58). In this way, the priest demonstrates the incarnational implication of God’s love for the sinner both in his own person and in the love he expresses for others. In the words of A.A. DeVitis, “Closed in tight in a prison cell, aware with a precocious intensity of the foulness and stench of human misery, he recognizes the reality of evil and, conversely, feels the presence of God” (338).

As another aspect of his spiritual development, the priest also realizes the reverse implication of the Incarnation: that he can really only understand God in terms of what he sees in other people. Just as an understanding of Christ’s embodied death for all is needed to love others even in their depravity, so understanding others as images of God is necessary for grasping the concept of a God who can love:

...at the centre of his own faith there always stood the convincing mystery—that we were made in God’s image. God was the parent, but He was also the policeman, the criminal, the priest, the maniac, and the judge. Something resembling God dangled from the gibbet or went into odd attitudes before the bullets in a prison yard or contorted itself like a camel in the attitude of sex...[He] pressed his hand with a kind of driven tenderness upon the shoulders of God’s image. (Greene *Power* 101)

People, being made in the image of God, represent the only real physical knowledge of God one may find on earth; humanity may be corrupted, but there remains something of God within the human person. The priest observes that to really see other people is to see something of God, and that therefore to take only the good parts of humanity is to miss out on learning something about God’s image through suffering and sin. The priest makes a similar observation in examining the face of his self-righteous accuser in the prison cell: “When you visualized a man or woman carefully, you could always begin to feel pity—that was a quality God’s image carried with it. When you saw the lines at the corners of the eyes, the shape of the mouth, how the hair grew, it was impossible to hate. Hate was just a failure of imagination” (131). The priest cannot hate when he really looks at another individual because he realizes the connection of even that person’s ugliness with God through the fact of being in His image. Looking closely at a person, really facing their depravity, their humanity, gives one a glimpse into what God sees and therefore allows one to participate in the love that God feels for that person. The priest, and therefore Greene, strikes the center of the doctrine of the Incarnation: the fact that humans are some sort of embodied reflection of God means that one cannot know God’s love without loving others. As Lewis notes of Greene’s Catholic novels,

It is, of course, characteristic of Greene that, in *The Power and the Glory*, where the divine image for once irradiates and redeems the human, it is seen doing so only to the most squalid, repellent and pain-racked of human conditions—just as omens of sanctity are seen only in an unshaven brandy-bibber. Natural beauty is not enhanced, but natural ugliness is touched by grace. (60)

Greene and the priest find the image of God not in the beautiful, but paradoxically in the broken, dirty, and depraved; by implication, those who refuse to face the reality of God's image in people, including their depravity, are unable to see God. If one cannot face the image of God, even its corruption, one cannot understand a God who took on flesh and suffering in order to save that corrupted image.

This incarnational idea is embodied particularly in the priest's interactions with and contemplations of his illegitimate daughter. When he sees the result of his drunken, lonely, despairing one-time lust, he is struck with "the shock of human love": "the sense of loneliness had driven him to an act which horrified him—and this scared shame-faced overpowering love was the result...his heart pound[ed] in his breast unevenly...with the baulked desire to save her from—everything" (Greene *Power* 65, 66). He is overwhelmed too with "an immense load of responsibility...For years, of course, he had been responsible for souls, but that was different...a lighter thing. You could trust God to make allowances, but you wouldn't trust smallpox, starvation, men" (66). Where before his sense of love for others was ephemeral and conceptual, this love for his daughter is shocking in its physicality and the reality of its implications for determining his own actions. He sees this love and responsibility as a sin because he believes it to be a contradiction of his more spiritual priestly call to love the whole world: "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 hobbled animal to the tree trunk” (82-83). The reader can easily see the irony, however; the priest is experiencing true love for his daughter, a love he never felt when he was overconfident and prideful in his priestly ability to save souls. This “hobbled” love, love that binds one to another, is God’s love: real, physical, painful, sacrificial. While before saving souls “was as easy as saving money: now it was a mystery,” and the priest is “aware of his own desperate inadequacy” (82). Now, experiencing love of an actual, physical individual human being rather than the abstract souls of constituents, the priest’s prayer echoes the purpose of Christ’s death on the cross: “O God, give me any kind of death—without contrition, in a state of sin—only save this child” (82). The priest is willing to give up even his soul to save that of his daughter, as Christ was willing to take on human flesh and suffer in order to save human souls. Though he does not realize it, the priest is embodying the implications of the Incarnation, experiencing for the first time the reality of Christ’s love for the world.

In the priest’s willingness to sacrifice his own soul for his daughter one may note another strong narrative theme founded in the doctrine of the Incarnation: the close tie between embodied human love and God’s love. This is also linked to the previously mentioned idea of bodily suffering tying oneself to the experience of Christ and therefore the love of others as God loves; in the priest’s experience, love is a sort of suffering, and causes a willingness to experience suffering in order to save another. The priest experiences suffering along with his fellow man and in this way learns to love as God loves in the midst of that suffering, much as Christ loved by experiencing human suffering on the cross. In the same way, he experiences true love for his daughter and is therefore willing to suffer for her sake, unwittingly demonstrating God’s sacrificial love as enacted by Christ’s suffering and sacrifice. In the apt words of Mark Bosco,

The whiskey priest undergoes a change of vision through his sinfulness and suffering. What he first thinks ugly—the poor, the prison hostages, the mestizo companion who betrays him—are now seen as manifestations of God’s presence. True to the notion of the ‘happy fault’ of Adam’s sin, the priest’s spiritual enlightenment comes not because he disavows or escapes his sinfulness, but precisely because of it. In being brought low he sees the beauty of Christ shining forth or, as the priest reflects, in ‘the shock of human love’ at watching his illegitimate daughter. (62)

As Pinkie’s sexual connection with Rose provided a means for grace to break into the dark physical reality of Brighton, so the priest’s human, natural love for his daughter has provided him with an opportunity to understand God’s love in a real and accessible way. His daughter becomes a form of incarnated grace, a chance for the priest to glimpse heaven even in the midst of hell, “the beauty of Christ shining forth.” As in *Brighton Rock*, heaven cannot be understood in terms of abstract ideas; only love in the form of human relationship can provide any sort of referent. In the words of Roger Sharrock, “when the priest tries to describe the joy of heavenly love he comes back, rightly, to his own painful love for his wretched daughter” (129).

One can see that in Greene’s incarnational imagination, then, even the most natural or base of human loves becomes a means by which God’s love can be communicated within earthly reality, because any love is closer to God’s love than no love at all.

In addition to the whiskey priest, another “character” demonstrates the increasing influence of the doctrine of the Incarnation on Greene’s fiction: God. As previously mentioned, the main story is that of the priest being pursued by the police lieutenant; however, in the underlying and more important plot, the priest and those with whom he comes in contact are all pursued by the person of God. Where in *Brighton Rock* God acted subtly in the form of an

unnamed pressure on the isolated self-damnation of Pinkie, in *The Power and the Glory* God is continually seen to act in ways that determine the course of the priest's actions. Indeed, the priest himself expresses an almost resigned frustration toward the force he acknowledges as directing his path sometimes against his will. When he is about to escape the territory on a boat, only to be stalled by a boy looking for help for his sick mother, the priest is described by Mr. Tench as a man who "got up as though unwillingly he had been summoned to an occasion he couldn't pass by... 'I shall miss it,' he said. 'I am meant to miss it'" (Greene *Power* 16-17). Though it seems that he should escape, now bereft of his wine and wafers and virginity, the priest refers to a sense of "duty" (40) even though no one but God would ever begrudge his flight. In the prison cell, contemplating his possible impending death, he wrestles with weariness over this duty and a desire to find peace in heaven if possible, something he feels God is purposely denying him:

It was, of course, the end, but at the same time you had to be prepared for everything, even escape. If God intended him to escape He could snatch him away from in front of the firing-squad. But God was merciful. There was only one reason, surely, which would make Him refuse His peace—if there was any peace—that he could still be of use in saving a soul, his own or another's. (129)

In a sort of strangely paradoxical, despairing sort of faith, the priest recognizes the active will of God as working through and within his experiences of suffering, using even such a sinful servant to work His purposes. This recognition of the overwhelming presence of God lends the priest an uncanny humility as he first walks into what he knows is a trap, offering last rites to a dying criminal, and then explains his actions to the lieutenant who captures him. Though the lieutenant mocks him for being afraid of death, the priest's response suggests that because God is a living person working through him, his own virtue or vice hardly matters:

‘But I’m not a saint,’ the priest said. ‘I’m not even a brave man.’ ... ‘That’s another difference between us. It’s no good your working for your end unless you’re a good man yourself. And there won’t always be good men in your party. Then you’ll have all the old starvation, beating, get-rich-anyhow. But it doesn’t matter so much my being a coward—and all the rest. I can put God into a man’s mouth just the same—and I can give him God’s pardon. It wouldn’t make any difference to that if every priest in the Church was like me.’ (195)

This stunning statement of God’s identity and agency apart from that of His servants’ also contains a not-so-subtle critique of the atheistic socialism of the lieutenant: because it requires that man be good in order to make a good society, it is bound to fail, because men are not infallible. On the other hand, because God has an identity not bound up with the failures of His workers, no matter the inevitable sins of men God’s will continues to be accomplished.

With regards to the Incarnation, then, the implications are twofold: first, that God uses sinners to accomplish His purposes, as previously discussed and demonstrated in the character of the priest, and second, that God can work as a character within the world of physical reality, not being limited by any arbitrary divisions between spiritual and physical realms. God works through and in the physical actions of people, regardless and often particularly because of their sinful state, but He is also His own character in the narrative, not limited by the success or failure of His servants, nor by persecution. As Greene contemplates in *The Lawless Roads*,

God didn’t cease to exist when men lost their faith in Him; there were always catacombs where the secret rite could be kept alive till the bad times passed: during the Calles persecution God had lain in radio cabinets, behind bookshelves. He had been carried in a



small boy's pocket into prisons; He had been consumed in drawing-rooms and in garages. He had Eternity on His side. (40)

This quotation also relates to another observation that can be made about the physical presence of God in the novel: He is literally present in the sacraments. The priest sees the importance of his continued provision of Masses and the Eucharist even despite his personal sinfulness and the looming probability of death by firing squad: "He began the Consecration of the Host...He could hear the sigh of breaths released: God was here in the body for the first time in six years. When he raised the Host he could imagine the faces lifted like famished dogs" (Greene *Power* 71). But Bosco also notes the interesting paradox of the narrative's gradual movement away from the Catholic sacraments:

On the surface of the text, the sacramental action of the priest is the sole vehicle to make God's grace present to the world, a religious vision that fits quite comfortably in the traditional Catholic sensibility of the early twentieth century...And yet these serve as ironic statements, for part of the priest's growth comes in rejecting the catechetical teachings of his Church because they act to truncate his faith and his ability to care for those in need of his consolation *qua* priest. ("From *The Power*" 64)

In other words, the more the priest develops in his understanding of God's love through his loving sacrifices for others, the less he distributes the actual Catholic sacraments such as Eucharist and confession. As previously mentioned, it does not seem that Greene meant to detract from the importance of the sacraments; indeed, the language he uses surrounding the literal presence of God within the Eucharist serves to support his incarnational perspective of the inseparable connection between the physical and the spiritual. Rather, Greene's movement away from the sacraments in the narrative drives home a stronger implication of the Incarnation: the

Catholic, through his works, actually becoming a sort of sacrament distributing God's love and grace to those around him. This is what the whiskey priest becomes: the body and blood of Christ to those he encounters by performing acts of love and grace. As Sharrock notes, the priest's actual becoming the sacrament can be seen in the way in which he influences those with whom he comes into contact: "the effect ranges from the first stirring of religious consciousness in Coral to a touch of pity in the dry soul of Mr. Tench the dentist. He calls out humanity in the lieutenant who breaks his rules and the law to find another priest for him" (124). Though he recognizes his own sin and despairs at the loss of his wafers and wine, the priest unknowingly becomes the form of Christ to those around him, distributing God's grace and mercy. This is the Incarnation: God taking on human flesh, allowing human flesh to be imbued with the presence of God. As Bosco puts it, the Incarnation means that "all forms of human interaction with the world have the possibility of being sacraments, defined as a visible sign of God's invisible reality" ("From *The Power*" 54). Even as the priest loses his symbols of the priesthood, his clothes and wine and wafers, his interactions with those around him become more sacramental the more he is overwhelmed by God's love. He becomes the body and the blood of Christ.

The sinfulness of the whiskey priest and the sundry sins of those around him drive home the reality that all humanity has failed to live up to its potential. But, according to Bosco, "failure...is the one legitimate form of victory in Greene's novels, suggesting that the doctrine of the Incarnation find its textual embodiment not so much in human creativity, but in human failure—the tragic, radically fallen nature of humanity" ("From *The Power*" 57). It is into this failure that God came, clothed in human flesh, in order to experience the consequences of this failure through suffering for the entirety of mankind. It is this embodiment of God that elevates even human failure to the level of potential sacrament. It is this incarnation that means that

failure is not the last word—that even in the depths, most particularly in the depths, God will find a way to transform that which seems most ugly into that which is most beautiful, to make hell into heaven. In *Brighton Rock*, Pinkie saw glimpses of this potential and turned away, his confident self-damnation too much of his identity for him to submit. In the whiskey priest of *The Power and the Glory*, however, Greene presents a potential for change regardless of submission, even when the character might still see himself as an irredeemable sinner. Though, like Pinkie, the priest might think himself damned even as the bullets of the firing squad riddle his body, the reader knows differently: he is more within God’s love now than he was as a self-righteous, beloved, apparently sinless priest. God, as a strong and living character, has worked through the implications of the doctrine of the Incarnation to make the whiskey priest His own. Whereas Pinkie’s coupling of hatred with Catholicism represented the scandal of *Brighton Rock*, the scandal of this second Catholic novel is what the end of *Brighton Rock* labels “the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God.” God’s mercy grips the sinner in the depths of his darkness and turns him into a saint.

#### **V. Pride and Pity in *The Heart of the Matter***

If *The Power and the Glory* tells the story of a man who humbly recognizes his sinfulness and the image of God within other sinful people, allowing him to embody God’s love for others, *The Heart of the Matter* represents Greene’s exploration of what would happen if one should reject one’s participation in the brokenness of the world and therefore miss the truth of God’s love as expressed through the Incarnation. Major Scobie, though a pious, morally upright man, thinks too much of his own ability to separate himself from suffering by eliminating the suffering of others. Thus he sets himself an impossible task that ultimately leads to his tragically unnecessary suicide. As Roger Sharrock observes, “The most dreadful of questions for the

Christian, the infliction of physical evil on the innocent of the world, is here fully engaged” (140). Whereas the whiskey priest was able to recognize the presence of the suffering Christ in the suffering of those he meets, Scobie attempts the impossible by trying to rid those he loves of suffering altogether, making himself into a sort of failed Christ while remaining blind to what Christ has already done. In this way, Scobie’s refusal to acknowledge the Incarnation shapes the entire tragedy of the novel.

Greene labels Scobie’s unwillingness to recognize the implications of the Incarnation as an “inordinate pride,” expressed through his ability to pity others but not love them. It is this difference between pity and compassion that Greene points to as his main theme:

I had meant the story of Scobie to enlarge a theme which I had touched on in *The Ministry of Fear*, the disastrous effect on human beings of pity as distinct from compassion. I had written in *The Ministry of Fear*: “Pity is cruel. Pity destroys. Love isn’t safe when pity’s prowling round.” The character of Scobie was intended to show that pity can be the expression of an almost monstrous pride. But I found the effect on the readers was quite different. To them Scobie was exonerated, Scobie was “a good man,” he was hunted to his doom by the harshness of his wife. (Greene *Ways* 125)

Many critics, the “readers” siding with Scobie as “a good man,” interpret Greene’s statement of theme as the author being too hard on his own character. Roger Sharrock sees in Scobie a sinning saint, like the whiskey priest, interpreting Scobie’s suicide as “an act of gratuitous sacrifice for a human being with whom he has no special ties... a purely Christian act” (144). Rather than unnecessary and tragic, then, Scobie’s final act is interpreted by Sharrock as the martyrdom that makes a saint. Kurismmootil similarly argues that pride cannot be Scobie’s tragic flaw because the reader is presented “with nothing more genuine or sympathetic than what is characterized in

Scobie; and pride implies a contrast...For pride, after all, is but a deliberate and willful decision in favor of an illusion. It must assume an alternative. But in the novel no such alternative course of action is indicated" (122). As will be demonstrated, however, the alternative, while in the background, can be found in the character of God Himself within the novel. Critics who reduce Him to a theological abstraction or simply ethereal presence within the narrative miss the alternative course of action He provides for Scobie, that alternative offered by the life of Christ: Jesus already came as incarnated God to redeem individuals out of suffering, meaning that Scobie does not have to take that weight upon his own shoulders. If Scobie only recognized that what he is trying to accomplish has already been completed in the incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, he would not have to travel the destructive path he chooses. This is the alternative both he and critics of the novel neglect, and his rejection of this alternative is the pride to which Greene refers.

Scobie, like Greene's previous tragic heroes, inhabits a degraded and corrupted world. The setting of West Africa, like the settings of Brighton and Mexico, contains the physical and emotional suffering, emptiness, degradation, ugliness, and boredom of a physical reality corrupted by sin. The heat is unbearable; there is the constant threat of malaria. Scobie's office in the police station reeks of "the odour of human meanness and injustice—it was the smell of a zoo, of sawdust, excrement, ammonia, and lack of liberty" (Greene *Heart* 15). In Sharrock's estimation, "Sierra Leone on the West African coast may, after Mexico, hardly seem to be a reshuffling at all. There is no temperate zone and moral issues steam and peel in the heat; if there is a distinction it is that Mexico was an indigenous suffering and dereliction, Africa is a place for expatriates to lose their roots and go to pieces" (130). Once again, the reader is offered a view of

hell on earth and given a character who copes in his own way with the recognition of this corruption.

Scobie's reaction to this brokenness provides a subtle though distinctive contrast with Greene's previous tragic heroes. As Kurismmootil notes, Scobie's "sentiments echo those of his prototypes: of Pinkie who felt a stranger anywhere but the dark, dingy lanes of Brighton... In his active liking for the ugly, he compares even better with the whiskey priest... Thus in a way he incorporates in himself the frightening insights into life tested and portrayed already in several of his prototypes" (97). Scobie also represents significant but subtle differences from his predecessors, however. Though his piousness and morality have the potential to fool a reader into aligning him with the whiskey priest of *The Power and the Glory*, his desire for control and his belief that he can somehow subvert God show that Scobie has more in common with the diabolical Pinkie Brown. The whiskey priest recognizes that all people suffer and comes to understand love, both love for others and God's love for him, when he comes alongside them in that suffering. Pinkie, on the other hand, sees the hell around him and, in prideful despair, adds to it rather than bringing good out from it. Similarly, Scobie sees hell, but rather than adding to it he tries to eliminate it on his own. Of course, since he himself is a part of what is broken, he is bound for failure. Both Pinkie and Scobie fall into the pride of thinking themselves somehow outside the reaches of both hell and grace: Pinkie thinks he can escape grace by playing Satan, and Scobie thinks he can escape hell by playing God.

This desperate attempt to escape suffering is first demonstrated in Scobie's relationship with his wife, Louise. In observing her misery at living in the inhospitable climate, her continuing sorrow over the death of their only child, and her pitiless mocking by the snobbish members of their colonial club, Scobie views his wife as something pathetic, ugly, and pitiable.

He sees her unhappiness and her ugliness as his fault, even as he paradoxically also sees her happiness as his continuing goal: “Fifteen years form a face, gentleness ebbs with experience, and he was always aware of his own responsibility. He had led the way: the experience that had come to her was the experience selected by himself. He had formed her face” (Greene *Heart* 16). Already, one may note the curious pride interlaced with the pity expressed by Scobie: though it initially seems sweet that he takes such responsibility for his wife’s emotional and physical state, that he takes sole responsibility for the shaping of her life is absurd and patriarchal.

His pity also can be seen to carry with it the dark undertones of a kind of disguised hate. Whereas true love draws people closer together despite and through flaws, as demonstrated in Greene’s previous novels, Scobie’s pity sees to it that “the less he needed Louise the more conscious he became of his responsibility for her happiness” (Greene *Heart* 21). In other words, the more he distances himself from the world of her suffering, the more he feels responsible for alleviating that suffering. Even at this early stage in the novel, he fantasizes that this responsibility might be eliminated by death: “so much of life was putting off unhappiness for another time. Nothing was ever lost by delay. He had a dim idea that perhaps if one delayed long enough, things would be taken out of one’s hands altogether by death” (23). This is not love; this is hate, a sort of lazy and cowardly disgust, a wishing to escape the other person, even through death, in order to be rid of their suffering. Where love would draw individuals together, bearing each other’s burdens and drawing out the good in each other, Scobie’s pity distances him from Louise and thrives on his recognition of her ugliness. It also requires that he set himself outside her pitiableness, as revealed when he observes others judging her in their club:

Scobie thought: What are those others worth that they have the nerve to sneer at any human being? He knew every one of her faults. How often he had winced at her

patronage of strangers. He knew each phrase, each intonation that alienated others...The worse was when he detected in his colleagues an extra warmth of friendliness towards himself, as though they pitied him. What right have you, he longed to exclaim, to criticize her? This is my doing. This is what I've made of her. (32)

The irony is clear: though he himself sees no problem in pitying Louise, he hates the idea that there might be something for which he could be pitied, namely Louise herself. Though he thinks he loves Louise for her ugliness, he does not want to be a part of that world of ugliness. Also ironically, though he wants to exclaim against the criticism of Louise by others, he himself has taken notice of those things for which they criticize her. In other words, both he and the snobbish colonists judge her for the same things, though their reaction is to snigger and his is to pity. Both despise Louise for who she is rather than accepting and loving her. Also, he again takes credit for any fault on her part. Rather than dismissing out of love her supposed social flaws as of no account except by the shallow standards of the club, he instead gives credence to them and takes responsibility for them, an odd sort of suffering pride. This is not love; he despises Louise as much as the other club members. Only his treatment of her marks a difference, but the patronizing mindset is the same.

Scobie occasionally expresses glimpses of understanding of the hopelessness of his task, though his actions always work in contradiction to his insights as the pressure of Louise's unhappiness weighs on him: "If I could just arrange for her happiness first, he thought, and in the confusing night he forgot for the while what experience had taught him—that no human being can really understand another, and no one can arrange another's happiness" (*Greene Heart* 85). He even has one strange moment of remembering that Louise is her own person with her own volition for happiness or unhappiness, but this instant of insight only deepens his feeling that he



has failed her in his attempts to make her life free of suffering: “Poor dear, she loved him: she was someone of human stature with her own sense of responsibility, not simply the object of his care and kindness. The sense of failure deepened round him” (96). Again, however, his knowledge does not seem to influence his actions; again, despite his recognition of his wife’s humanity, she is again reduced to “poor dear.” The weight of his responsibility for Louise’s impossible happiness only grows, and, seemingly unwilling to turn to the God he supposedly believes in, Scobie sees no one but himself to shoulder the entire irrational burden.

In the end, Scobie is willing to sacrifice his integrity by taking a risky loan from a local Syrian, Yusef, in order to send Louise to South Africa, a move he claims is only for her happiness, but over which he expresses an extreme sense of relief. Unsurprising considering the previous passages mentioned, though certainly in contradiction to his claims that he loves her, Scobie anticipates the sweetness of being left entirely alone while simultaneously experiencing intense guilt over recognition of his own relief. Kneeling at the altar rail for their last Communion together, “he thought: I’ve prayed for peace and now I’m getting it. It’s terrible the way that prayer is answered. It had better be good, I’ve paid a high enough price for it” (*Heart* 98). The reader is left to wonder whether the price he mentions refers to Louise leaving or the loan from Yusef; one gets the sense that he is referring to the loan. In any case, the quote reveals once again Scobie’s paradoxical attempts to escape suffering and his guilt over desiring to do so; he hates being in the presence of the suffering he feels, in his irrational pride, he has caused while also hating himself for finally (he thinks) escaping that suffering. The problem can be found in Scobie’s contradictory and incorrect understanding of peace. Kurismmootil explains,

In its religious context, the word [peace] has connotations of a sense of being full, of contentment; it implies a plenitude that satisfies longing...For Scobie, however, peace

means not fulfillment but a negation...Peace then means to him a disavowal of certain associations and memories. According to his scripts, *peace* reads equal to *no emotion*.

Consequently he dreads every occasion when another's needs or aspirations might make demands upon his compassion. (103-105)

In other words, Scobie has a definition of peace that does not match that offered by his religious faith; he desires absence of emotion, an absence of all suffering, while the peace offered by God is the ability to deal with suffering without despair in the acknowledgement of God's ultimate power, justice, and healing. Scobie rightly feels guilt over his request for peace, since what he asks for requires his complete isolation from others. He is being torn apart by his guilt over this isolation and his continued urge to eliminate suffering in others. "An obsessive pity and an urge to withdraw are, then, complementary strains in his character... We notice his anxious withdrawal from life's concerns, and yet poised against it is an intense responsiveness to suffering" (Kurisimmootil 105). No one, not even a good man like Scobie, can keep up those sorts of contradictions for long.

Neither can he let them go. Even after Louise has been safely sent to South Africa, Scobie finds another individual to which he can attach his pity: Helen, a woman thirty years his junior who has been widowed and forced to spend forty days on the open ocean after her ship is torpedoed by a submarine. In the formation of this relationship Scobie's pride shows through horribly clear; though he is finally "free" from his responsibilities with Louise away, he feels as if he must get involved with Helen, that somehow she needs him:

The lights were showing in the temporary hospital, and the weight of that misery lay on his shoulders. It was as if he had shed one responsibility only to take on another. This was a responsibility he shared with all human beings, but that was no comfort, for it

sometimes seemed to him that he was the only one who recognized his responsibility. In the Cities of the Plain a single soul might have changed the mind of God. (Greene *Heart* 122)

Scobie does not realize that it is not that others refuse to recognize their “responsibility,” but that this burden is not his to carry. In the same way, his reference to “the Cities of the Plain,” another name for the biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, reveals a perspective of himself as the only one pleading before God for the salvation of the world, as if God did not Himself care about the fate of those He created. As Sharrock observes, “Scobie transfers his own emotion of devouring pity to others; he suffers in his person their immense need as he imagines it and in so doing fails to grasp the facts of the case” (138). Scobie places on himself the weight of a corrupted world, refusing to recognize that God does care about suffering and has already done something to transform it. Though he refuses to see it, the truth remains evident: Scobie’s heavy burden of pity is not the only choice of action. Scobie needs his pity. It acts as a drug for him, a perverse form of power, making him feel needed even as the burden of his responsibility destroys him.

In the same moment outside the clinic, he has yet another moment of clarity, and yet again he refuses to see how his thoughts might reveal his own pursuit of “peace” to be useless: “What an absurd thing it was to expect happiness in a world so full of misery...But one still has one’s eyes, he thought, one’s ears. Point me out the happy man and I will point you out either extreme egotism, evil—or else an absolute ignorance” (123). Scobie recognizes the truth that the world has been corrupted by sin and that therefore suffering is a constant presence, but, like Pinkie in *Brighton Rock*, he misapplies this understanding. Scobie still pursues this impossible happiness through his own efforts, driving himself to despair with the weight of his task. He

himself embodies the extreme egotism that he declaims. It is also in this moment that he expresses the main theme and title source of the novel:

The lights inside would have given an extraordinary impression of peace if one hadn't known, just as the stars on this clear night gave also an impression of remoteness, security, freedom. If one knew, he wondered, the facts, would one have to feel pity even for the planets? if one reached what they called the heart of the matter? (124)

Here one can see the crux of Scobie's thinking: he has a Catholic understanding of the corruption of the world without the simultaneous Catholic knowledge of a God who came to suffer in order to redeem suffering, a God who sees "the heart of the matter," all the brokenness of the universe, and bears it on His own shoulders. The reader here starts to gain an impression of Scobie's view of God and how it relates to his human relationships: his God, though He exists, is handicapped and impotent, unable to do anything about the suffering of the world.

As with Louise, Scobie never expresses anything close to love for Helen. He is drawn to her by her childishness, less to her physical features than those items that signify her vulnerability and pain: "It was the stamp-album and not the face that haunted his memory for no reason that he could understand, and the wedding-ring loose on the finger, as though a child had dressed up" (Greene *Heart* 123). He sees her as someone who does not "know her way around," as a "stupid, bewildered child" (157). They fall into sex without even desire on Scobie's part, a fact he readily admits; their affair is entirely founded upon his pity:

...his body in this climate had lost the sense of lust; he watched her with sadness and affection and enormous pity because a time would come when he couldn't show her around in a world where she was at sea. When she turned and the light fell on her face

she looked ugly, with the temporary ugliness of a child. The ugliness was like handcuffs on his wrists. (159)

Once again, Scobie has placed himself in bondage, tying himself to a woman not out of love but out of a prideful pity disguising hate, seeing ugliness and feeling convinced that it is his sole responsibility to pity it. He refuses to see any alternative: that Helen would be better without him, that she would recover from the suffering of her ordeal and make her own way in the world despite whatever “ugliness” Scobie perceives. “Scobie takes it as self-evident that he alone could, and would, guide her through a wayward world” (Kurismmootil 114). Instead, he equates his pity with love: “The word ‘pity’ is used as loosely as the word ‘love’: the terrible promiscuous passion which so few experience” (159). Just as with Louise, Scobie does not see in Helen a full human being, but only the hollow form of her suffering, and is tragically convinced that it is his responsibility to bring her happiness, that he stands outside the world of suffering enough to bring her out of it as well. He does not see that he himself is a part of the corrupted universe, and that as such he is bound for failure in his task, bound to bring her more suffering rather than peace.

As Scobie’s relationship with Helen progresses and his life is brought to the breaking point with the slow growth of his corruption and the return of Louise, the reader is also given concentrated glimpses into his perspective of God. As previously mentioned, Scobie’s morality and Catholic faith have the potential to deceive readers into thinking his perspective is infallible; unlike Greene’s previous two novels, however, *The Heart of the Matter* does not offer such a straightforward perspective. As DeVitis notes,

Scobie’s responsibility and concern for unhappiness characterize him in such a way that he deludes himself, and perhaps the indiscriminating reader, into thinking that he is

essentially humble. And this is the paradox upon which the characterization is built; Greene challenges the reader to discover the error of Scobie's thought, while at the same time he makes Scobie so human and so understanding that his error appears to be noble. (339)

The discerning reader, then, can note the disturbing similarity between Scobie's relationship with God and his relationships with wife and mistress: Scobie pities God. Seeking peace in church but unable to find it, "it seemed to him for a moment that God was too accessible. There was no difficulty in approaching Him. Like a popular demagogue He was open to the least of His followers at any hour. Looking up at the cross he thought, He even suffers in public" (Greene *Heart* 154). Just as Scobie pities Louise for allowing herself to be made fun of in their club, he pities God for allowing Himself to be exposed in such a humiliating manner. As he expresses frustration that he cannot find peace in the sacraments because "there's nothing to absolve," that the prayers of repentance are nothing more than "Latin words hustled together—a hocus pocus" (154), it seems that Scobie fails to sense any power in the religious performance because he fails to see any power in the person of Christ; what is the point of his prayers if they are directed towards no more than an embarrassing "popular demagogue"?

At yet another Mass, having just avoided taking Communion by faking illness while unrepentant of his adultery, "Scobie thought: God has just escaped me, but will He always escape?" (Greene *Heart* 213). Later, when he has no choice but to take Communion in order to reassure Louise, Scobie has a vision of "God who of His own accord was surrendering Himself into his power" (223), of "a bleeding face, of eyes closed by the continuous shower of blows: the punch-drunk head of God reeling sideways" (237). This reveals Scobie's perspective of God as someone like Helen and Louise, someone whom he can corrupt with his own corruption, a victim

of his own making that he can pity. Scobie believes he has the power to make God suffer, and hates himself for it. Again, Scobie also expresses shame that God would allow Himself to be that vulnerable:

It seemed to him for a moment cruelly unfair of God to have exposed himself in this way, a man, a wafer of bread, first in the Palestinian villages and now here in the hot port, there, everywhere, allowing man to have his will of Him. Christ had told the rich young man to sell all and follow Him, but that was an easy rational step compared with this that God had taken, to put Himself at the mercy of men who hardly knew the meaning of the word. How desperately God must love, he thought with shame. (213)

This is “cruelly unfair” of God to Scobie because it offers opportunity for men to injure God and also to pity Him for those injuries. In Scobie’s world this represents a responsibility to pity God while also watching himself do damage by sinning, a perpetual cycle of guilt and failure. As with his expressions of pity for Louise and Helen, Scobie’s hatred for God here is only partially disguised by his weary acceptance of yet another burden. He is frustrated to death that God would put Himself in such a position, a position that requires yet another deprivation of peace on Scobie’s part. This, then, reveals Scobie’s belief in the Catholic God with a significant missing clue to understanding His character, the cornerstone of the entire Christian religion: the Incarnation.

Scobie hates suffering and attempts to eliminate it at all costs; he has no ability to understand a God who entered into the suffering of the world in order to express His love. Christ on the cross, then, rather than an image of victory, represents for Scobie the exact failure he spends all his energy trying to avoid. The crucifixion is the ultimate expression of despair, of the

suicide of God: “Christ had not been murdered—you couldn’t murder God. Christ had killed himself: he had hung himself on the Cross” (190). As Kurismmootil aptly states,

to Scobie, God is a spent force, an imbecile. In *The Heart of the Matter*, as in the other works, it is around the Crucified that the religious motif is rallied: for Scobie the image symbolizes the God who failed. Failure he reads as the final meaning of Jesus’s death. Despair was the reason for Calvary, not sacrifice; and this being so there is hardly anything further to hope for: not victory, nor regeneration. (125)

The Incarnation to Scobie, then, is God’s failure, despair rather than sacrifice, God’s ugliness and vulnerability on display, and Scobie pities Him for it rather than seeing this “failure” as the only solution for his impossible situation, for the problem of suffering for which he feels such a burden. He feels a responsibility to God much as he feels a responsibility to his women, and in his prideful pity sees himself as the center of all value equations determining which contradictory responsibility must be followed: “God can wait, he thought: how can one love God at the expense of one of his creatures? Would a woman accept the love for which a child had to be sacrificed?” (Greene *Heart* 187). He tries to bargain with God, using his own salvation as his leverage: “‘O God,’ he said, ‘if instead I should abandon you, punish me but let the others get some happiness’” (220). Without the Incarnation, Scobie cannot understand that he is not the center of these equations of salvation, that his own sacrifice is not capable of securing the salvation of others. He does not see that what he is attempting to do is what Christ has already done.

The Incarnation reveals God’s love for humanity, His wish for His creation to have a way out of the suffering that they themselves have created through the progressive corruption of sin. Christ’s death on the cross, His taking on human flesh, makes it possible for even regular human



suffering to have meaning, to have eternal significance in bringing individuals closer to an understanding of the God who suffered. Scobie, ignorant of this truth, tries to be a sort of Christ, offering his own suffering as payment for the happiness of others. He refuses to see that God has already done something, and that it is not the avoidance of suffering, but the elevation of human experience including suffering, that has the only potential for providing peace in the midst of hell on earth. Scobie does not see that he himself is one of those little ones Christ came to save, that he himself is trapped within the system of suffering, that God has cared all along about suffering and does not need to be bargained with. Scobie thinks too much of himself and too little of himself at the same time, that he should have the ability to bargain with God but not consider what God has already done out of His love for him.

For in the same way that he pities both God and those he “loves,” Scobie also knows himself to be a constant failure in light of his inability to do anything but add to the suffering of others no matter how hard he tries; he himself is a part of the corruption he attempts to eliminate. Fully conscious of how his pity for Helen means his moral failure before both God and his wife, Scobie is broken under the weight of his guilt: “Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, nor Helen” (Greene *Heart* 162). That other victim is God; Scobie has in God yet another object of pity and victim of his failures, inciting more pity in an exponentially burdensome cycle. He notes in a few brief moments the possibility of an escape from this deadly spiral: “He thought: I’ll go back and go to bed, in the morning I’ll write to Louise and in the evening go to Confession: the day after that God will return to me in a priest’s hands: life will be simple again. Virtue, the good life, tempted him in the dark like a sin” (186). Every time, however, he returns to his sense of responsibility, his pride of pity, ignoring the escape that his realization of his own unimportance could provide.

Instead he cries, “why me...why do they need me, a dull middle-aged police officer who had failed for promotion? I’ve got nothing to give them that they can’t get elsewhere: why can’t they leave me in peace?...It sometimes seemed to him that all he could share with them was his despair” (189). And because God seems to refuse to keep him from hurting anyone, Scobie’s perspective of God’s weakness only grows as he acknowledges his own failures: “Thinking of what he had done and was going to do, he thought, even God is a failure” (254). Scobie denies God as person in that he denies that God has any ability to act for Himself as a character within the story of human existence; “being but a creature of Scobie’s imagination, His is a phantom existence; and a phantom cannot move, does not create or renew” (Kurismmootil 130).

Scobie is offered one final chance to change at the climax of the narrative: his last visit to the church before his suicide, where he has a conversation with God. Thinking himself already beyond the hope of redemption, for the first time Scobie is truly honest with himself and God:

He said, O God, I am the only guilty one because I’ve known the answers all the time. I’ve preferred to give you pain rather than give pain to Helen or my wife because I can’t observe your suffering. I can only imagine it. But there are limits to what I can do to you—or them. I can’t desert either of them while I’m alive, but I can die and remove myself from their blood stream. They are ill with me and I can cure them. And you too, God—you are ill with me...You’ll be better off if you lose me once and for all...I’ve longed for peace and I’m never going to know peace again. But you’ll be at peace when I am out of your reach...You’ll be able to forget me, God, for eternity. (Greene *Heart* 258)

Scobie admits his avoidance of suffering, that he has had other options for action and thought. He presents his choice of suicide as the only way to keep Louise, Helen, and God from suffering

any more than he has already made them suffer. And then the heartbreaking moment—Scobie hears God pleading:

You say you love me, and yet you'll do this to me—rob me of you for ever. I made you with love. I've wept your tears. I've saved you from more than you'll ever know; I planted in you this longing for peace only so that one day I could satisfy your longing and watch your happiness...Can't you trust me as you'd trust a faithful dog? I have been faithful to you for two thousand years. (258-259)

God's pleading gives words to the alternative that Scobie has had all along: to trust that God has an ultimate plan for suffering leading to peace in the end, as embodied by the Incarnation, by His willingness to suffer and die in order to elevate the suffering sinner. Scobie should see that he can trust God because He is already working in that exact moment: "he couldn't keep the other voice silent; it spoke from the cave of his body: it was as if the sacrament which had lodged there for his damnation gave tongue" (258). God is alive, embodied, working within and through physical reality to speak to Scobie. Scobie should trust that God will work for those he loves, but tragically, he refuses: "No. I don't trust you. I've never trusted you. If you made me, you made this feeling of responsibility that I've always carried about like a sack of bricks...I can't shift my responsibility to you...I'm responsible and I'll see it through the only way I can" (259). Scobie rejects God's power, rejects the fact of the Incarnation, continuing in his habit of taking the burden of the world's suffering upon himself and allowing it to drag him down to his death.

Greene writes of the end of the novel, "Suicide was Scobie's inevitable end; the particular motive of his suicide, to save even God from himself, was the final twist of the screw of his inordinate pride" (*Ways* 126). When Scobie walks away from God's pleading in the church, his pride reaches its climax; he is committed to the idea that he will kill himself and

“then Hell will begin, and they’ll be safe from me, Helen, Louise, and You” (Greene *Heart* 262). His pride, however, while keeping him from accepting grace for himself, paradoxically also blinds him to the fact that he might not have the power of damnation that he thinks he does. In other words, Scobie’s pride causes him to damn himself and to think that he has the ability to do so, but Greene’s ending leaves the reader in doubt as to Scobie’s eternal fate. God is still fighting for Scobie, even as the overdose begins to take effect: “It seemed to him as though someone outside the room were seeking him, calling him, and he made a last effort to indicate that he was here” (264). Scobie responds to the feeling of “someone appealing to help, someone in need of him” by calling out “‘Dear God, I love...’ but the effort was too great” (265). Greene himself was frustrated that so many critics and reviewers focused on the question of Scobie’s salvation or damnation rather than the theme of pity in the book. He admitted, “Maybe I am too harsh to the book, wearied as I have been by reiterated arguments in Catholic journals on Scobie’s salvation or damnation. I was not so stupid as to believe that this could ever be an issue in a novel” (*Ways* 126). In accordance with Greene’s own statements of theme and an analysis of the novel itself, then, a reader can only conclude that the fate of Scobie’s soul remains, appropriately, a mystery. Greene seems to imply in the ambiguity that only God can truly sound the depths of a man’s heart and the severity of his sins; Scobie warns the reader not to assume too much about one’s own ability to see rightly to spiritual ends. As the priest argues to Louise on the very last page, “‘For goodness’ sake, Mrs. Scobie, don’t imagine you—or I—know a thing about God’s mercy...The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn’t know what goes on in a single human heart’” (Greene *Heart* 272).

Ironically and somewhat unbelievably, Scobie does not see that his suicide will cause more rather than less suffering for Helen and Louise. More importantly, however, he also fails to

understand that perhaps suffering is a part of what all humans must experience in order to grow closer to God. Indeed, it is only when Helen is grieving Scobie's death and absence from her bed, not in his comforting presence, that she first reaches out to God in an attempt at a prayer:

She asked, 'Do you believe in a God?'

'Oh well, I suppose so,' Bagster said, feeling at his moustache.

'I wish I did,' she said, 'I wish I did.' ...the wish struggled in her body like a child: her lips moved, but all she could think of to say was, 'For ever and ever, Amen...' The rest she had forgotten. She put her hand out beside her and touched the other pillow, as though perhaps after all there was one chance in a thousand that she was not alone, and if she were not alone now she would never be alone again. (271)

The text implies that Scobie's death will bring her into a relationship with God, a relationship which will fill the holes of her grief and give her the love she is looking for, but only through the suffering of loss. As Roger Sharrock observes, "Helen had scoffed at his scruples about the sacraments, but she now enjoys an intimation of the presence of God, and it is as if ...[Scobie] has achieved the caring for her he desperately desired in his lifetime" (136). Throughout her relationship with Scobie up to this point, who only strikes up with her because he tries to assuage the suffering of the loss of her husband at sea, Helen has only scoffed at ideas of God and religion. A reverend's daughter, she hates what she sees as Scobie's hypocrisy in sleeping with her while unable to shake his convictions concerning Catholic dogma. But when Scobie dies, she is faced finally with her loneliness, grief, and suffering, and turns to God. The implications are clear: one might find through suffering the God who understands suffering, the God who suffered as a human Himself. Scobie, by trying to prevent and avoid suffering, unconsciously

plays a sort of Satan, keeping Jesus off the cross, keeping Helen from having reason to find companionship in this suffering savior.

Throughout the novel and regardless of his eternal fate, then, Scobie's primary tragic flaw is revealed to be his willful ignorance of the implications of the Incarnation: he refuses to see people (including himself), physical and suffering and agonizing as they are, with any grace, but only judgment and pity. He hates them (and himself) because of their ugliness, rather than loving them despite it, as Christ loved humanity and took on its ugliness in order to heal it. As for God, Scobie sees Him as yet another suffering victim, embarrassingly weak and impotent. Scobie sees the world and its brokenness and "wonders that a God should have conceived of such a world; and once created, it could be so abandoned as to be so irredeemably lost... With God having washed His hands clean of all responsibility, Scobie must bear the entire weight of the burden as best as he may" (Kurismmootil 125). In disregarding the Incarnation, Scobie forgets that God has not washed his hands of the world; indeed, he suffered Himself to redeem it. Therefore, it is not on Scobie's shoulders to pity all and to bear their suffering. If he had only remembered the Incarnation, Scobie would have realized that the burden was not his to bear and perhaps could have avoided his tragic self-destruction.

If Greene's Catholic novels in regard the Incarnation are all about how his characters respond to physical experience and a physical God, then the story of Scobie examines how one responds when one cannot handle the suffering that the world always offers. Scobie, instead of understanding the Incarnation as God taking our suffering upon Himself to make something meaningful out of it, to bring mercy and heaven into the world, sees suffering as something he has the power to get rid of completely for those he loves, a manic sort of pride that leads to his destruction. Through Scobie, Greene demonstrates that the point of the Incarnation, of a

suffering God, is that we can face suffering and find peace in it, not find peace by trying to avoid it for ourselves and others—a feat that is just not possible in a broken world.

### VI. Sex and Suffering in *The End of the Affair*

*The End of the Affair*, as the last of Graham Greene's self-labeled "Catholic novels," marks the climax of his religious thinking expressed in narrative, particularly in regards to the Incarnation. Along with the gradual development of his religious thought through his writing, Greene also dealt over the years with issues of faith in his personal life, contributing to his narratives and most strongly in the case of this fourth novel. Like the novel's narrator Bendrix, Greene himself had been involved in a long-term affair with the married Catherine Walston, who refused to divorce her husband on the basis of her Catholic belief. Like Sarah Miles, Catherine Walston "was determined not to be chaste and yet she was deeply religious" (Sherry 219). Like Maurice Bendrix, "there would be many times when Greene became angry and jealous over Walston, for it was Harry, not Greene, she [Catherine] went home to" (Sherry 224). Greene even included his and Catherine's secret word for sex, changing it from "garlic" to "onions" in the book so Catherine's husband wouldn't catch on (Sherry 261).

Overall, however, Sarah is not Catherine and Bendrix is not Greene; in fact, the real affair continued even after the book had been published (Gorra xiv). What the novel does capture is the reality of Greene's struggle with God and the body, the great paradox of a perfect, holy Being who not only created people, but most scandalously put on their skin and suffered in order to rescue them. Indeed, this book captures Greene's view that "all forms of human interaction with the world have the possibility of being sacramental, visible signs of God's invisible reality... The scandal of the Incarnation... is that the divine is found in the endeavors of the flesh, so that the spiritual life must be understood in part as the strivings of the flesh, just as the desires of the

flesh must be understood as a possible path for the soul” (Bosco *Catholic Imagination* 22). In short, in *The End of the Affair* Greene seeks to better understand the holy mystery of the Incarnation by examining the doctrine’s apparent secular opposite: an adulterous sexual relationship.

In a close reading of the novel, then, an impression of the physical nature of a relationship with God and its comparison to a sexual affair continually come up within the thoughts and images of the text. As one example, one of the most notable, most physical, though somewhat negative metaphors used several times by the author is that of a relationship with God being caught like a chronic disease or illness. This comparison comes from the mouths of several different characters in the story. Ironically, the first use of disease as metaphor comes from the thoughts of Bendrix during his visit to the private detective, referring to the ordinary jealousy of human love: “Nothing that I had to say would be strange to Mr. Savage, nothing that he could unearth would not have been dug up so many dozens of times already that year. Even a doctor is sometimes disconcerted by a patient, but Mr. Savage was a specialist who dealt in only one disease of which he knew every symptom” (Greene *End* 14). Revealingly, the next use of the image appears in Sarah’s letter to Bendrix when she knows she is dying, describing her newfound faith: “I’ve caught belief like a disease, I’ve fallen into belief like I fell in love” (121). Interestingly, here we also see a direct comparison of her belief in God to falling in love with Bendrix. The jealousy of human love and the overwhelming nature of God’s love are of the same quality: they are like a consuming, raging, bodily disease, taking over one cell at a time until the entire person is conquered.

The final and most sacramental example of this strong metaphor can be found in Sarah’s mother’s revelation to Bendrix that she baptized Sarah as a baby. She remarks that she “always



had a wish that it would ‘take.’ Like vaccination” (Greene *End* 136). Greene seems to suggest the possibility here, most shockingly, that somehow by just a sprinkling of water, Sarah was given the “disease” of God from the very beginning of her life, marking her indelibly through a simple physical, human ceremony. The incarnational thinking is clear: Sarah was marked in body by baptism, and in body she caught God’s love as if she had indeed been “vaccinated” with holiness against her desire to escape Him. God works through a physical sacrament to claim her, body and soul, as His own. Through this metaphor of love as disease, then, one not only has a revealing comparison made by the author between human love and God’s love, but also an image of the Catholic belief in the power of the sacraments and the incarnational nature of grace. Seemingly broken human loves have things in common with God’s love, and even simple physical acts can have immense spiritual, eternal significance as the ways in which grace works through sinful reality.

Beyond this specific metaphor of disease, the comparisons between Sarah’s sexual relationship with Bendrix and her spiritual relationship with God are numerous, demonstrating clearly the author’s perspective on God’s love as demonstrated in the Incarnation, working in and through physical human reality. To begin, God is often spoken and referred to as a lover competing against Bendrix for relationship with Sarah. Bendrix first refers to this “third party” in discussing his reasons as narrator for relating the story: “There it goes again—the I, I, I, as though this were my story, and not the story of Sarah, Henry, and of course, that third, whom I hated without yet knowing him, or even believing in him” (Greene *End* 26). The third, of course, is God, though the reader has not yet had this irony revealed. The irony continues when Mr. Parkis, Bendrix’s hired detective, recovers part of what seems to be a love letter from Sarah’s wastepaper basket. Bendrix jealously reads the passionate words:

And certainly it must have been addressed to a lover: 'I have no need to write to you or talk to you, you know everything before I can speak, but when one loves, one feels the need to use the same old ways one has always used. I know I am only beginning to love, but already I want to abandon everything, everybody but you: only fear and habit prevent me.' (41)

Bendrix's jealousy, we later learn, is both appropriate and ironic, as Sarah did write the letter to her new lover, but that He is not simply another human lover as Bendrix believes. Sarah is involved in a new relationship, but not with another man. She is in love with God. Only one page later, Bendrix further develops the ironic, yet painfully real nature of his jealousy:

...there still remains jealousy of my rival—a melodramatic word painfully inadequate to express the unbearable complacency, confidence and success he always enjoys.

Sometimes I think he wouldn't even recognize me as part of the picture, and I feel an enormous desire to draw attention to myself, to shout in his ear, 'You can't ignore me.

Here I am. Whatever happened later, Sarah loved me then.' (42)

The reader is struck with the irony of Bendrix's jealousy: utterly appropriate, as Sarah has found herself wooed by another, and yet just as utterly futile, as this new lover is inexhaustible and all-powerful. The resulting vision is one of the strange paradoxes of God's incarnational love: eerily similar to human love in its emotions and results, and yet so far beyond human love that no "rival" stands a chance. God's love, in Greene's story, is both physical and spiritual, human and yet utterly holy.

As Bendrix's jealousy demonstrates this mystery of incarnational love, even more so do Sarah's journal entries reveal disconcerting parallels between her growing love for God and her

human love affairs. Indeed, she herself recognizes the correlation in one particularly potent entry:

Did I ever love Maurice as much before I loved You? Or was it really You I loved all the time? Did I touch You when I touched him? Could I have touched You if I hadn't touched him first, touched him as I never touched Henry, anybody? And he loved me and touched me as he never did any other woman, But was it me he loved, or You? (Greene *End 99*)

Here we see Sarah struggling with the same paradox as Bendrix, though from the opposite side; Bendrix approaches God via his hate and jealousy, while Sarah approaches by seeing the similarities between human love and God's love. She realizes that both resonate in the same place, what she calls "the desert": the loneliness of human experience that every person attempts to fill with love, whether human or otherworldly (72). This connection grows stronger in her understanding by the end of the same entry:

...he [Bendrix] gave me so much love, and I gave him so much love that soon there wasn't anything left, when we'd finished, but You. For either of us. I might have taken a lifetime spending a little love at a time, eking it out here and there, on this man and that. But even the first time, in the hotel near Paddington, we spent all we had. You were there, teaching us to squander, like You taught the rich man, so that one day we might have nothing left except this love of You. (99)

Sarah, and through her the author, makes a somewhat scandalous comparison between her sexual relationship with Bendrix and God's pursuit of her. In her view, both loves are one and the same, and God allowed her to come to the end of the satisfactions of human love so that she might look for Him. Greene is here demonstrating again "that the divine is found in the endeavors of the

flesh, so that the spiritual life must be understood in part as the strivings of the flesh, just as the desires of the flesh must be understood as a possible path for the soul” (Bosco *Catholic Imagination* 22). However shocking, the spiritual significance is clear: within the story, God uses a debased, sinful human love to point Sarah toward His love, which is not dissimilar from, but rather so similar to human love as to fill, completely, the same gap. This is the implication of the doctrine of the Incarnation: God’s love comes through human experience, saving human selves by providing what one has been looking for all along. In the words of Evelyn Waugh, “The compassion and condescension of the Word becoming flesh are glorified in the depths” (95). At the bottom of the pit of human experience, there God’s love is found.

This brings us to the most obvious discussion of incarnational themes as crafted by Greene: Sarah’s journalized thoughts on the body contemplated as she sits in the pews of a Catholic church. At first, she notes, she is disgusted by the very embodied nature of the religion:

I hated the statues, the crucifix, all the emphasis on the human body. I was trying to escape from the human body and all it needed. I thought I could believe in some kind of a God that bore no relation to ourselves, something vague, amorphous, cosmic...stretching out of the vague into the concrete human life, like a powerful vapour moving among the chairs and walls. (Greene *End* 87)

Upon further reflection, however, she realizes it is not so much the art of the church that puts her off, but her very hatred of her own body and the sinful things it has done. She wants to believe in a religion of spirit, not a religion that sees the body as something important, worth saving, and capable of redemption:

One day I too would become part of that vapour—I would escape myself for ever. And then I came into that dark church in Park Road and saw the bodies standing around me on

all the altars—the hideous plaster statues with their complacent faces, and I remembered that they believed in the resurrection of the body, the body I wanted destroyed for ever. I had done so much injury with this body. How could I want to preserve any of it for eternity...If I were to invent a doctrine it would be that the body was never born again, that it rotted with last year's vermin. (87)

In this train of thought, however, Sarah is faced first with her desire to keep both her body and Maurice's, since it was those bodies that they loved and with which they expressed that love. She realizes that love cannot be separated from the body, because the body is central, not just an accessory, to the human experience. Then she is confronted with the appalling strangeness of the figure of Jesus on the cross:

And of course on the altar there was a body too—such a familiar body, more familiar than Maurice's, that it had never struck me before as a body with all the parts of a body, even the parts the loin-cloth concealed...So today I looked at that material body on that material cross, and I wondered, how could the world have nailed a vapour there? A vapour of course felt no pain and no pleasure...Suppose God did exist, suppose he was a body like that, what's wrong in believing that his body existed as much as mine? Could anybody love him or hate him if he hadn't got a body? I can't love a vapour that was Maurice. (88-99)

This journal entry is worth quoting at length because Sarah's words cut to the quick of the theme of the Incarnation at the center of the novel: if God did not have a body, did not know human experience, could He love or be loved? Can an embodied human love or be loved by something without a body? The answer, as Greene asserts through Sarah's experience, is no. Human experience, including human love, is rooted in the body, so a true relationship with God can only

exist within a religion that recognizes that fact and places significance on the human body. This scene, then, is the climax of this theme in the text. In the words of Mark Bosco, “The hinge of Dramatic action for [this novel] depends on this doctrine...a participation in Christ’s mystical substitution on the cross, whereby Christ willingly takes the place of sinful humanity” (*Catholic Imagination* 42). This truth directs the novel. Because of it, Sarah realizes that she cannot dismiss her physical relationship with Bendrix as somehow separate from her spiritual relationship with God, therefore leaving open the possibility of maintaining both at once. Rather, because God manifested Himself as a human and suffered in the body for her sins, she is forever tied body and soul to that overwhelming, physical, jealous, incarnated love of God for her.

In the physical metaphor of disease for God’s love, similar language correlating a sexual relationship and a relationship with God, and Sarah’s encounter with the physical nature of God’s love in the pews of the Catholic church, one can discern the central theme of the Incarnation in *The End of the Affair*. Through the novel, Greene demonstrates that human beings cannot be wooed and repulsed, loved and competed with by a vaporous, ephemeral God. God is not only a character with form, life, and will, living and working within the story to direct the plot; His love works within the physical, sexual love of Sarah and Bendrix to draw them to Himself. One wonders if perhaps Greene wrote the book in an attempt to rid himself of his guilt in his relationship with Catherine much as Sarah tries to convince herself that she doesn’t need to keep her foolish promise to God in exchange for Bendrix’s life. In any case, the reader is left with a religious perspective of a God who is not restricted or disgusted by the flawed bodily nature of humanity. Rather, He works within it to embody His irresistible, irrefutable, all-powerful love.

## VII. Conclusion

In the words of Mark Bosco, Graham Greene's "writing echoes the hopes and dreams of a religious faith creatively imagined in the midst of the real horrors of the twentieth century" ("From the Power" 72). As such, Greene represents a unique and significant response to the difficulties of a modern era: unique in his use of Christian themes, significant in his prominence as a modern novelist and his continued place in the canon of modern literature. In this position, Greene demonstrates that Christianity in fiction does not represent something opposite to the open-endedness or complicated perspective of a modern literature dealing with the aftermath world wars and declining religious assurance. Rather, it demonstrates that more than one road can be taken to dealing with these difficulties without reducing their problematic paradoxes to simple moralisms or allegory. Paul Elie says of Christianity in modern fiction: "These stories are not "about" belief. But they suggest the ways that instances of belief can seize individual lives" (4). Like the rest of modern fiction, the writings of Graham Greene attempt to find a way to approach the problems and difficulties of the reality of human existence, to uncover its meanings or lack thereof. By examining the lives of characters influenced by belief, Greene does not reduce or turn away from the complications of existence in a modern world; rather, he examines the difference made by belief, for good or for ill, and what that means for modern humanity. As many people in Greene's time and today still struggle with the implications of religious belief, Greene's work can then be said to almost be more realistic than many other authors who avoid the problem of faith in the modern world.

Graham Greene, then, realizes the possibility of a nuanced, complicated modern fiction that engages religious thought. His writing demonstrates that modern fiction should not be defined as that which is devoid of religious thinking. Rather, religious thinking should be seen as a possible alternative to the atheistic philosophical thought that dominates the majority of

modern literature. Greene, along with his contemporaries Evelyn Waugh, T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, G.K. Chesterton, and Dorothy Sayers, represents a different option for thinking about and living within the paradoxes of the modern era. His narratives demonstrate a search for the key within the ideas of Christianity, though what his readers discover is not simplified or pithy, but rather true to reality with nuances and paradoxes. The paradoxes of Christianity in interaction with the problems of modern living offer in Greene and other Christian authors of the period a difference from the solid pessimism of other modern authors: the possibility of hope, of meaning, of purpose beyond the simple materialism of barest human existence.



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