CHAPTER III.

RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS
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Sin, redemption, and grace are the three fundamental ideas in the Christian religion. Christianity teaches us that through Adam's sin man has cut himself off from supernatural life. Christ's crucifixion has, however, assured mankind of its Redemption. Grace provides the indispensable means by which the merits of the Redeemer are applied to the individual soul, giving it life and all that the living soul needs to attain its eternal destiny. Greene frequently refers to these Catholic concepts in his works.

The soul is immortal. But sin deprives the soul of supernatural life, for it robs it of sanctifying grace. If a man dies in a condition of mortal sin, he loses salvation. The Catholic, however, even when in the state of sin, ordinarily retains the supernatural virtues of faith and hope --- unless his sin be heresy, apostasy, despair or presumption. He thus continues some measure of interior communion with his Church.

Catholics believe in the sacrament of Baptism. They believe by Baptism all sins -- be they the worst imaginable,

be they one or innumerable — are unconditionally forgiven if the one baptized has the right disposition.3 The Catholics also believe in the doctrine of Confession. The church enjoins every Catholic who has reached the age of reason to confess once a year if he is in the state of mortal sin. No member of the church, regardless of his status or individual holiness, is freed from his obligation to confess his sins. The obligation to confess applies to mortal sins alone since the confession of venial sins is optional. 4 God's forgiveness of sin restores the soul to sanctifying grace and makes it worthy to enter heaven. The Catholic Church certainly recognises that priests can and do sin. But it is an obvious part of the Roman system that "the character of the minister cannot invalidate the efficacy of the rites which he performs, any more than the private character of a secular judge can invalidate his legal decisions." 5

A Catholic, when he commits a sin, is aware of

3. WHEREON TO STAND: WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE AND WHY, p. 194.
4. WHEREON TO STAND: WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE AND WHY, p. 205.
what he is doing. He cannot blink the fact that he has committed a sin. Many modern people try to abolish the moral law and dismiss the idea of sin altogether. They thus deaden their conscience to any difference between what is spiritually good and what is spiritually evil.

The Catholic knows that if he does so, he must abolish not only every spiritual value in the world, but God as well.

The Catholics believe that Christ conferred upon their Church the authority not only to teach His doctrines but also to administer His sacraments. The sacraments are the channels through which the fruits of the Redemption are applied to the individual soul. They are thus the channels of divine grace. Each sacrament was constituted by Christ for a particular purpose and each sacrament imparts a grace which helps to achieve the end for which it was instituted. This grace is called sacramental grace. 6.

The Catholics believe that the graces and fruits of the Redemption are applied through each of the seven sacraments to the soul of the individual. 7.

7. UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC FAITH, p. 29.
'Baptism' removes original sin; 'Confession' forgives actual sin; 'Holy Eucharist' nourishes spiritual life; 'Confirmation' strengthens Christian faith; 'Holy Orders' confers powers of priesthood; 'Matrimony' unites husband and wife; 'Extreme Unction' gives consolation and strength. 

We find frequent references to these Catholic concepts throughout Greene's works. Another Catholic doctrine to which Greene refers very frequently is that of "Original Sin". Christianity teaches us that in eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve committed the sins of pride and disobedience. On account of their sin, Adam and Eve lost sanctifying grace, the right to heaven, and they became subject to death, suffering, and a strong inclination to evil. As a punishment for their sin, they were driven from the Garden of Eden. On account of the Fall of Adam and Eve, we, their descendants, come into the world, deprived of sanctifying grace. This sin, which comes down to us through our origin or descent from Adam, is called "original sin". 

"The fact of original sin explains why man is so often

tempted to evil and why he so easily turns from God. Because of the ignorance resulting from original sin, the mind of man has difficulty in knowing many necessary truths, easily falls into error, and is more inclined to consider temporal than earthly things. The penalties of original sin — death, suffering, ignorance and a strong inclination to sin remain after Baptism, even though original sin is taken away". 10.

Besides original sin, there is actual sin which we commit ourselves. Actual sin is of two kinds, mortal and venial. Mortal sin is a grievous offence against the law of God and deprives the sinner of sanctifying grace and makes the soul of the sinner deserving of everlasting punishment in hell. Venial sin is a less serious offence against the law of God, which does not deprive the soul of sanctifying grace, and which can be pardoned even without sacramental Confession. 11.

Another important Catholic doctrine is the sanctity of marriage. Christ taught that the bond of Christian marriage is unbreakable and forbade divorce.

10. UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC FAITH, p. 76.
11. UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC FAITH, pp. 77-79.
saying: "What therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder". 12. Again, "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another, committh adultery against her. And if the wife shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committh adultery." 13.

In compliance with Christ's command, the Catholic Church proclaims the indissoluble character of Christian marriage and forbids divorce.

A clear understanding of these Catholic concepts and doctrines is necessary for the proper understanding and appreciation of Greene's works. We have seen how in his early novels like ITS A BATTLEFIELD and ENGLAND MADE ME, Greene denounced the maladjustments and injustice of our social order in plain human terms. In his next novels, BRIGHTON ROCK, THE POWER AND THE GLORY, and THE HEART OF THE MATTER, Greene proceeds to explain the evil and suffering around us in theological terms. Pinkie, the whisky-priest and Scobie are openly concerned with the issue of Salvation and Damnation. They are Catholics and they "know". They are sinners who are tormented by the knowledge of the gravity of their sin. The three consecutive

12. Mathew 19:6
novels, BRIGHTON ROCK, THE POWER AND THE GLORY, and THE HEART OF THE MATTER are full of this spiritual intensity. Greene has great faith in God's grace and points out in these Catholic novels that even the smallest act of faith or love is infinitely precious to God and will work for the salvation of the least worthy of us.

BRIGHTON ROCK is Greene's first specifically Catholic novel. In this novel the characters discuss concepts like grace and sin, salvation and damnation, explicitly for the first time. BRIGHTON ROCK is filled with a sense of pity for what human beings have managed to make of themselves, and a feeling that, whether they are damned hereafter or not, they are certainly damned here. The lawyer, Prewitt, refers to this fact with a quotation from Marlowe: "Why, this is Hell, nor are we out of it". 14.

Pinkie and Rose are aware of their mortal sin and Pinkie even takes a little pride in the prospect of his own damnation. But, throughout the book, there is a constant suggestion of "something outside trying to get in", namely God's grace. During the time he plans Rose's murder, Pinkie is conscious of the forces of tenderness and pity breaking against his defences. In a pub on the way, even as he loads his revolver, he feels the "prowling pressure

14. BRIGHTON ROCK, pp. 281-282.
of pity."  

Later on: "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 -- an awful distraction, and he drove blind into the rain".  

Pinkie thus resists God's grace to the end. Still we feel like Rose's confessor at the end of the novel that Pinkie may have been saved at the last moment by "the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God." Greene seems to suggest that even Pinkie with all his pride might have repented for all his sins and been forgiven by God during his fall from the cliff-edge to the sea. The repeated use of the lines,

"Between the stirrup and the ground
He mercy asked and mercy found;"

produces this impression on us.

God's mercy, even if it sometimes looks like

15. BRIGHTON ROCK, pp. 311.
16. BRIGHTON ROCK, p. 322.
17. BRIGHTON ROCK, p. 331.
punishment, has no limits. Greene insists on the fact that we have no right to sit up as judges in this matter. Greene repeatedly stresses the infinite mercy of God. He tries to win our sympathy and admiration even for the obnoxious youth, Pinkie, and suggests that he may have been saved at the last moment. He points out that no one can say what goes through the mind when the spirit is drawn to lucidity by the immediacy of death.

The dialogue between Rose and the old priest makes it clear that only by a profound knowledge, almost a love of sin and despair accompanying it, can a human being attain salvation. The priest tells Rose of Péguy, the French Catholic writer, who lived in sin, because he could not bear the idea that any soul was going to be damned. The old priest says:

"There was a man, a Frenchman, you wouldn't know about him, my child, who had the same idea as you. He was a good man, a holy man, and he lived in sin all through his life, because he couldn't bear the idea that any soul could suffer damnation. This man decided that if any soul was going to be damned, he would be damned too. He never took the sacraments, he never married his wife in church. I don't know, my child, but some people think he was -- well, a saint .......... You can't conceive my child, nor

18. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.331.
can I or anyone -- the...... appalling...... strangeness of the mercy of God." 18.

It is from humanity of this kind that a person reaches salvation. Greene seems to suggest that Rose by sinking to the depths of sin due to her love for Pinkie might have been able to save him. He points out that the operation of Grace through God's mercy is so strange that even as bad a sinner as Pinkie can be saved through its mysterious agency. God's grace can use such unpromising material as Rose to work out such miracles.

God's grace works in mysterious ways. Father Rank, in THE HEART OF THE MATTER, tells Louise: "For goodness' sake, Mrs. Scobie, don't imagine you -- or I -- know a thing about God's mercy." 19. Again, he says of Scobie, who has committed adultery, sacrilege, and suicide: "It may seem an odd thing to say -- when a man's as wrong as he was -- but I think from what I saw of him that he really loved God." 20.

The whisky priest, in THE POWER AND THE GLORY, says

18. BRIGHTON ROCK, p.331.
to the lieutenants: "I don't know a thing about the mercy of God: I don't know how awful the human heart looks to him. But I do know this -- that if there's ever been a single man in this state damned, then I'll be damned too." 21. In THE END OF THE AFFAIR, passion struggles with faith. Sarah, who writes, "I have caught belief like a disease", is drawn to God against her will. In her case, Grace comes like a bolt from the blue.

The world is evil, but God's grace operates in strange and mysterious ways to draw people away from evil. It thrusts martyrdom upon a mean and cowardly whisky priest and draws even a passionate woman like Sarah Miles towards God against her will. Even a most villainous person like Pinkie may have a weak point in his armour through which the besieging love of God may get in. "There is only one hero in everyone of Mr. Greene's novels: a vague creature called Grace". 22.

Marie - Béatrice Mesnet remarks: "The light of the infinite love of God is shed over all Greene's characters. Nowhere in the scriptures is there a text that directly states that any man is consigned to the torments of Hell.


What we do know with certainty is that the thief crucified with Jesus, probably no better human material than Greene's characters, was the first to whom the joy of heaven was promised.  

That is why Greene suggests that there is a chance even for Pinkie. Jean Guittton finds that Greene habitually sees grace operating through sin, and the worst sins, sacrilege and suicide, function as the means to grace. Grace comes "not through the exercise of good, but through the experience of evil".

Greene believes in the mysterious power of prayer. Faith can move mountains. We see how the prayers offered to God by the characters at some crucial moments in their lives are answered without fail. This happens in THE POWER AND THE GLORY, THE HEART OF THE MATTER, THE END OF THE AFFAIR, and THE POTTING SHED, to quote a few instances.

The priest in THE POWER AND THE GLORY is so concerned with the future of his illegitimate daughter, Brigitta, that he prays: "Oh God, give me any kind of death -- without


contrition, in a state of sin — only save this child." 25. The priest's death in a state of mortal sin suggests that the first part of the prayer at least is answered. We have to believe that this perhaps is the means of redemption for his illegitimate child.

In THE HEART OF THE MATTER, Scobie is so overwhelmed with pity for the child who dies in the temporary hospital erected at Pende for the victims from the torpedoed ship, that he prays to God: "Father, give her peace. Take away my peace for ever, but give her peace." 26. The child dies in peace, but Scobie gets soon involved in a love-affair with Helen Rolt which leads him to adultery, sacrilege and finally to suicide.

In THE END OF THE AFFAIR when Bendix is knocked down by a door during an air-raid, Sarah supposes him to be dead. She prays to God along the lines of the priest and Scobie. She describes the event in her diary: "Dear God, I said...... 

............I can't believe. Make me........Make me believe...

........I love him and I'll do anything if you'll only let him be alive............... and then he came in at the door,


and he was alive. 27.

At the end of Sarah's prayer Bendrix comes to her alive. But Sarah has to desert him for God and bear the pangs of separation from her lover. This leads her towards faith in God and her sanctification later on. God answers her prayer as he answered the prayers of the priest and Scobie. In a letter to Bendrix written on her death-bed, Sarah writes: "I believe there's a God -- I believe the whole bag of tricks, there's nothing I don't believe, they could subdivide the Trinity into a dozen parts and I'd believe............ I've fallen into belief like I fell in love." 28.

In the play, THE POTTING SHED, James, the son of the rationalist, Henry Callifer, was found as a child hanging dead in the potting shed and was restored to life by the prayers of his uncle, Father Callifer. Father Callifer's prayers to restore James' life remind us of the prayers offered by the priest, Scobie, and Sarah. Father Callifer offered his faith in return for James' life. Father Callifer prayed: "Let him live, God. I love him. Let him live. I will give you anything if you will let him live . . . . . Take away my faith, but let him live." 29. James' life was saved

but Father Callifer lost his faith and became a drunkard. Greene thus refers to the mysterious power of prayer in some of his works.

Marie-Beatrice Mesnet, in her study of Greene's three Catholic novels, *Brighton Rock*, *The Power and the Glory*, and *The Heart of the Matter*, remarks: "With Rose we meet for the first time the theme of the supreme sacrifice, offered to God for the love and salvation of men, which in the other novels will take the extreme form of the whisky priest's martyrdom and Scobie's oblation. Peguy seems to have influenced Greene profoundly during the period when these three novels were being written and it provides an additional link between them." 30.

Charles Peguy, the French Catholic writer, challenged the idea of eternal punishment by deliberately remaining in a state of mortal sin. The central characters in Greene's Catholic novels are ready, like Peguy, to be damned for the sake of others.

Rose loves Pinkie so much that she does not want to be parted from him for eternity. "I want to be like him -- damned," 31 she says. For love of him she commits mortal sin

by marrying him without sacrament. For him she is ready to sacrifice everything including her own salvation. She would even have killed herself after Pinkie's death. But she was afraid that "somewhere in that obscure countryside of death they might miss each other — mercy operating somehow for one and not for the other." 32. We feel at the end of the novel that Rose might be the means of Pinkie's salvation.

The whisky priest also sacrifices himself to the people he serves. His heart is filled with the love of God and "an enormous tenderness" for the image of God. When he dreams of his daughter, he prays, "Oh God, help her. Damn me, I deserve it, but let her live for ever". 33. His heart is filled with tenderness and love even for the half-caste who wanted to betray him to the police: "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 this half-caste?" 34. Finally, the priest accomplishes the greatest act of love and sacrifice by laying down his life for God and the people he served.

32. BRIGHTON ROCK, pp. 330-331.
34. THE POWER AND THE GLORY, p.126.
Scobie sacrifices his life for the sake of those whom he loves. Before his sacrilege, Scobie makes one last attempt at prayer: "O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them." He becomes "aware of the pale papery taste of his eternal sentence on the tongue." Scobie feels great anxiety for those he loves, Louise and Helen. He also feels the horror of "striking God" while performing sacrilegious acts. It seems to us that his suicide was undoubtedly an act of sacrifice for those he loved and also a genuine act of love for God.

We thus see that Greene frequently refers to the Christian doctrine that one soul can atone for another, and, by suffering and love, be the means of its salvation. We feel at the end of BRIGHTON ROCK that Rose, with her love for Pinkie and her readiness to be damned for him, might have brought about his salvation. In the same way, the whisky priest's sacrifice has not been in vain. Even though he is executed, another takes his place and the boy Luis is won to the church by the priest's martyrdom. Greene seems to suggest that Scobie's death too has not been

in vain. After his death, Helen feels an emptiness in her heart. "Do you believe in a God?" she asks Bagster and exclaims: "I wish I did . . . . . . I wish I did". 37. Scobie's love and sacrifice seem to have cleared the way in her for gaining faith in God.

On several occasions in his works, Greene has referred to the Catholic concepts of the Resurrection of the dead, and Immaculate Conception. Greene feels that even though these may seem improbable to modern man, these are among the central beliefs of Christianity. Greene often refers to the Catholic belief in miracles. For instance, in THE END OF THE AFFAIR, Sarah's sanctification is unfolded by a series of miracles. Bendrix's prayer to Sarah is answered when he prays to her to save him from seducing a girl he meets on the day of Sarah's funeral. The detective's small boy is cured of a dangerous fever after receiving a childhood book belonging to Sarah. The rationalist Smythe loses the strawberry birth-mark on his cheek where Sarah had kissed him.

The view Greene adopts in BRIGHTON ROCK and develops in THE LAWLESS ROADS and THE POWER AND THE GLORY is that a society that is untouched by Catholic grace

has abandoned charity and has put a spurious morality in its place. John Atkins points out that Ida Arnold, in BRIGHTON ROCK, is a follower of George Bernard Shaw. Shaw urged people to ignore eternities and to dismiss sin, salvation, and damnation as superstitions. Shaw did not believe in evil and claimed that man alone was responsible for his own fate and that he could be guilty of nothing graver than "wrong." Ida is a true disciple of George Bernard Shaw. She believes in the "Life-Force" and has fallen away from true faith. 38. Rose tells Pinkie of Ida Arnold: "Right and wrong. That's what she talks about .......... As if she knew". She adds: "I'd rather burn with you than be like Her. She's ignorant." 39. Greene has nothing but contempt for the shallow, materialistic ideas of Ida Arnold.

THE LAWLESS BROTHERS is frankly propagandist. Greene loathed Mexico where his religion had been banned in some parts and so discouraged in others that it was accompanied by despair. Mexico had rejected the Catholic faith and replaced it by a socialist society. In effect it had created a vacuum. People had to believe in nothing except a cooling

39. BRIGHTON ROCK, pp. 150-151.
universe and blank vacancy. Soon, however, the people began to worship privately the God that they were not allowed publicly to worship, and due to the pressure from the Catholic population, Churches which were now Government property were allowed to open in most of the states, except for the hundreds that had been turned into cinemas, newspaper offices and garages. 40.

Greene describes how he went into the Templo Del Carmen, as darkness set in, for benediction. To a stranger like himself it was like going home. One knew what was going on. Old men came to the church on bare feet. Though they were tired out with work, they were yet ready for further mortification of their flesh. The way in which the poor squeezed the last drops of mortification out of their already terribly hard lives, convinced Greene of the vital need these people felt for their religion — for the gilt, incense, and ceremony. 41. THE LAWLESS ROADS, though a travel book, is interesting chiefly for Greene's attitude to the religious problem. The most explicit of all Greene's Catholic propaganda is to be found in this work. Greene denounces the state which does not think in terms

41. THE LAWLESS ROADS, p. 51.
of human beings, and prosecutes anyone for the common good. He says: "Perhaps the only body in the world to-day which consistently -- and sometimes successfully -- opposes the totalitarian state is the Catholic Church." 42.

The lieutenant in THE POWER AND THE GLORY believes in the totalitarian state. He would drive out everything that brought misery, poverty, superstition, and corruption in his State. He thinks of the poor children around him: "They deserved nothing less than the truth -- a vacant universe and a cooling world, the right to be happy in any way they chose. He was quite prepared to make a massacre for their sakes -- first the Church and then the foreigner and then the politician -- even his own chief would one day have to go. He wanted to begin the world again with them, in a desert". 43.

Later on, he tells the poor people of the village: "You're fools if you still believe what the priests tell you. All they want is your money." 44. He asks them not to believe the priests who, instead of helping them to get enough food, talk to them about heaven. He tries to convince them that the world will be a better place to live in.

42. THE LAWLESS ROADS, p. 85.
43. THE POWER AND THE GLORY, pp. 70-71.
44. THE POWER AND THE GLORY, p. 93.
if all the priests are exterminated.

Religion, however, triumphs in the end. The priest is executed, but his prayer - "Oh God, send them someone more worthwhile to suffer for" 45..... is answered, and another takes his place. The lieutenant loses the unshakable conviction in his ideas and the boy Luis is won to the Church by the priest's martyrdom.

In THE LAWLESS ROADS, Greene points out the antithesis between religion and materialism in Mexico. The theme of THE POWER AND THE GLORY is the same as that of THE LAWLESS ROADS - the antithesis between religion and materialism. The two views are embodied by the priest and the lieutenant respectively. The lieutenant's hatred of the priest is ideological. He is even prepared to take and shoot hostages from the village in his attempt to catch the priest. The lieutenant stands for materialism and authoritarianism and is symbolised by his revolver. Greene points out that revolvers can do nothing against the "terrible aboriginal calamity" in which the whole human race is implicated.

Greene is of the belief that it is better to keep hold of the comfort provided by religion than be disillusioned

45. THE POWER AND THE GLORY, p. 175.
by the hypothetical happiness based on materialism. He points out that man will be left with nothing in the absence of belief in God. Utopian ideals and a belief in a juster world are not only impracticable, but they are also a menace to the freedom of the individual soul and prevent it from developing in its own way. We find in the novel, *The Power and the Glory*, that Greene accepts the traditional Catholic views on poverty and suffering in the place of the radical tendencies of his earlier works. The priest tells the lieutenant: "We have facts, too, we don't try to alter --- that the world's unhappy whether you are rich or poor --- unless you are a saint, and there aren't many of those. It's not worth bothering too much about a little pain here" 46. The priest adds: "We've always said the poor are blessed and the rich are going to find it hard to get into heaven. Why should we make it hard for the poor man too? ...... It's better to let him die in dirt and wake in heaven --- so long as we don't push his face in the dirt." 47.

Greene often condemns modern civilization with its deceptive gloss. He repeatedly shows the sordiness that lies

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behind the outward show of civilization. JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, which describes Greene's journey through the Republic of Liberia, is interesting for what it tells us about the fascination that the seediness of the civilization of the coast exercised over his mind. Greene points out in this book that nothing civilization can do will ever conceal the truth about human beings. It can only distort it, making parodies of the primitive.

To Greene, seediness is the symbol of civilization. He describes the seediness of Liberia in these words: "There seemed to be a seediness about the place you couldn't get to the same extent elsewhere, and seediness has a very deep appeal: even the seediness of civilization, of the sky signs of Leicester Square, the 'tarts' in Bond Street, the smell of the cooking greens off Tottenham Court Road, the motor salesman in Great Portland Street." 48 Greene believes that the illusion of progress is worse than the original squalor.

In BRIGHTON ROCK, Greene has made use of every opportunity to introduce the macabre or squalid detail. Spicer lying asleep in a stale whisky-filled room looking pitifully grey and old, Rose's parents in Nelson Place sitting in a "mood" on either side of an unlit stove among unwashed dishes and lavatory smells; Billy, the blind owner

of Pinkie's lodging-house, earning a living by pressing clothes while his wife has illicit relations with Dallow, a lodger; the seedy lawyer, Mr. Drewitt, sitting among his empty files with his house vibrating with the motion of the locomotives on the line, and blaming his unfortunate marriage for all his misfortunes—these descriptions leave an unforgettable impression on the mind.

Greene stresses the idea that "seediness" is the true symbol of modern civilization. That is why he turns to the drab and the seedy rather than to "the smart, the new, the chic, the cerebral", so often in his works. These maladjustments in society are the facts of life rather than the so-called great achievements in which men put their trust, forgetting God, the only reality. Greene also senses a parallel between human development away from the primitive and the corruption and the individual loss of innocence in childhood.

49. JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS, p. 312.