Fundamentals of Catholicism: A Brief Resume

In his works Greene refers to certain Catholic concepts. And we must have a clear understanding of these Catholic doctrines in order to comprehend fully the spiritual intensity of his works. Greene strongly denounces the role of the secular society by highlighting its inability to get rid of the man-made miseries and emphasizes the need of a spiritual life in a world, rapidly detaching itself from God and moral values. Infact Greene seems to believe that "even a sordid life under the shadow of religion is infinitely better than an atheistic and purely materialistic life in a 'chromium' world" (Subramanium 170). Some of Greene's characters like Scobie, the Whisky priest, Pinkie, and Rose are openly concerned with salvation and damnation and the means to achieve them. Greene also challenges the dogmatic views regarding the visitation of the divine grace while dissecting the prospects of their redemption. So a brief discussion of these Catholic concepts seems to be essential in order to grasp the spiritual significance of Greene's works.

Roman Catholicism is concerned mainly with the nature of sin, the working of the divine grace and the prospects of redemption of the soul. The soul has been conceived as a spirit, a gift of God to man. The soul which is immortal and indestructible is the principle of life in man. It is an immaterial being but it is capable of exercising intelligence and freewill.
God has been depicted as “the supreme Being, a pure spirit, intelligent and free, existing by Himself from all eternity and possessing all perfections to an infinite degree” (Courtois 17). Roman Catholicism regards God as infinitely merciful emphasizing His readiness to forgive the repentant. Infact God seems to be the emblem of pure and unmixed love, and God loves his creations so deeply that he wants them to share his glory and happiness.

Christianity defines sin as “a wilful disobedience to the Holy Will of God, the Supreme Master of the world” (Courtois 26). Sin is of two kinds, original and actual. The concept of original sin has been frequently referred to by Greene in his works. Eve, tempted and deceived by the Devil, wished to have the knowledge of good and evil and be like God. So, Adam and Eve committed this sin by consuming the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge. This violation of the divine decree, a sin of pride and disobedience, deprived Adam of the special privileges granted to him by God namely the sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is thought of as “a special communication of God to the soul by which the soul is made to share in the life and sanctity of God and becomes capable of acting supernaturally” (Courtois 19). As the descendants of Adam and Eve man receives this sin of the original pattern and has become subject to death, suffering and a strong inclination to commit evil:
“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 the original sin, the mind of man
faces difficulty in knowing many necessary truths, easily falls
into error, and is more inclined to consider temporal than
eternal 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” (under
standing 29).

There are two kinds of actual sin, namely mortal and venial. Mortal
sin is a heinous offence as it implies a violation of the Holy will of the
Supreme Ruler of the world so completely as to foil the purpose of His
creation. Mortal sin deprives the soul of the sanctifying grace thereby
making it unable to enjoy its supernatural life. Infact mortal sin leads to
the spiritual death of the soul and as a result the soul deserves
everlasting punishment in hell.

Venial sin may be regarded as a less serious offence against the
law of God. Those who commit this sin surrender partially to the forces
of the evil and thereby weaken their will to serve God and to love Him
above all things. This estrangement from God however does not deprive
them of the sanctifying grace. A word of impatience, some uncharitable
remark, carelessness at the time of prayer, a minor theft, a small lie may
be cited as some instances of venial sin. Confession of mortal sins is essential but in the case of venial sins it is optional. However if the sinner of venial sins remains unrepentant he will be punished in the next life by a stay in purgatory. Purgatory is a state of suffering which cleanses the souls, not thoroughly pure, of their impurities and thereby makes them eligible for the heavenly life.

Catholics, whenever they commit any sin, cannot remain oblivious to it and its consequences. They are the people who know what is spiritually good and what is spiritually bad and are therefore oppressed by their awareness of the gravity of their sins. They cannot ignore this awareness unless they deny God Himself along with all spiritual values.

Roman Catholicism also speaks about the sacraments, the external rites, the performance of which enables individual souls to receive the graces and the fruits of redemption. Sacraments, instituted by Jesus, are seven in number. They are Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy order and Marriage. Catholics believe that “each sacrament worthily received confers a twofold grace: first sanctifying grace or an increase of it if it is already present in the soul; second a grace proper to each different rite and called sacramental grace” (Courtois 103).

Baptism, the first and the most necessary sacrament removes the original sin from the soul and thereby enables it to receive God’s
sanctifying grace. The one who undergoes Baptism pledges to abdicate Satan, along with his works and pomps.

Confirmation strengthens Christian faith and enables the Catholic to defend his faith triumphantly against the onslaught of evil. Here the Holy Ghost passes on the spiritual fortitude and strength to the believer.

"The Holy Eucharist is the sacrament in which Jesus, true God and true Man gives himself under the appearance of bread and wine to the members of His Church to be their sacrifice and their spiritual food" (Courtois 113). The performance of the rites of the Holy Eucharist is done in course of the Holy Mass a religious ceremony recalling the Last supper of Jesus. Thus the sacrifice of the Cross is reenacted by the priest in course of the Holy Mass so that "the faithful may offer to God a sacrifice worthy of Him, a sacrifice through which they can give God due glory and adoration, thank Him for His benefactions, obtain the forgiveness for their sins and of the punishments attached to them, and to ask the graces necessary to lead a good Christian life" (Courtois 115).

So, it is essential on the part of a Catholic to attend Mass on Sundays. Mass has been referred to several times in The Heart of the Matter. Returning from South Africa, Louise, for example questions Scobie if he has been attending Mass during her absence and she also reminds him that missing Mass on Sundays is a mortal sin.
Communion is a religious ceremony in which the participants receive a small piece of bread to eat and a small quantity of wine to drink. The bread stands for Christ's body while the wine symbolizes Christ's blood. A Catholic attending Holy Communion must be in a state of grace and if a sinner attends it without having confessed and without having been absolved of his sins, he will face damnation. Thus in The Heart of the Matter Scobie, guilty of a mortal sin namely adultery, avoids going to Communion by complaining of a pain in his chest and taking a little brandy to relieve it. It is noteworthy that one can not attend communion after taking liquor.

After his resurrection Jesus empowered the body of Apostles to forgive man's sins:

Receive Ye the Holy Ghost:

Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them:

and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

(John 20:22–23)

Performance of penance, a sacrament enables a priest to forgive the faithful in the name of God if he confesses his faults with due contrition. Contrition is a deep sorrow that a sinner experiences for having hurt God together with the abhorence of his sin and a determination not to commit it again. Every Catholic regardless of his status or individual holiness
should confess his sins to receive sanctifying grace which will make his soul eligible to enter heaven.

It is noteworthy that a dying confession is compulsory to save the soul from damnation. Father Rank therefore informs Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* that people always need him when they are dying: "The dying' Father Rank said, 'that's what I'm here for" (183).

Again Scobie goes to confess his adulterous love affair but he is not repentant of his sinfulness. So the words of absolution fail to bring any relief to Scobie and he leaves the church remaining as unhappy as when he had gone inside. And in *The Power and the Glory* the Lieutenant tries to secure the services of Padre Jose to hear the priest's confession as the priest is going to be executed very soon.

Roman Catholicism firmly upholds the sanctity of marriage by proclaiming its indissoluble character and strongly denounces divorce:

> What therefore **God** hath joined together, let not man put asunder. (Mathew 19:6)

The holy nuptial thus celebrates the glory of mutual love and fidelity unto death. Thus the Holy Bible declares:

> Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her.

And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery (Mark 10:11-12)
In *The Heart of the Matter* Scobie violates the sanctity of marriage and as a consequence finds himself in a state of mortal sin.

We come across frequent reference to the concept of heaven and hell in Greene’s novels. Heaven is certainly not a place in the worldly sense of the term but a state featuring supreme bliss resulting from the entrancing vision and possession of God and the wellbeing of the senses. God and the Holy angels experience this state of everlasting joy and happiness. Heaven has some other names like; Heavenly Jerusalem, Abode of God, Paradise and Life Everlasting.

God created hell and hurled Lucifer and his train of rebel angels into it to suffer eternal punishment. Hell being eternal and unending its inhabitants will never be able to come out of it. Thus the one who estranges himself totally from his Divine Master in this world and never repents his sins is destined to suffer forever in hell. “The chastisement of hell” observes Courtois, “consists in the pain of dam or of loss and in the pain of sense” (12). Hell is called by some other names like Gehenna, Eternal Dead, Eternal Punishment, and Bottomless Pit.

Finally the concept of virtue and vice needs a brief discussion. A virtue has been delineated as a special disposition of the soul which guides its action to achieve its desired goal. And we must realize the spiritual significance of two virtues namely hope and charity as they often set the destiny of Greene’s characters. Hope is a supernatural
virtue which makes the faithful inclined to believe in the infinite goodness of Jesus Christ God as the very source of everlasting happiness. And he depends on the divine providence to reach this state of spiritual bliss. Charity, another supernatural virtue inspires man to love God above everything else for His infinite perfection and to love his neighbour for the sake of God's love. Thus charity gives man an opportunity to repay a little God's infinite love for him.

Vices may be defined as "evil dispositions of the soul or habits which incline it to evil and sin". (Courtois 179) There are seven main vices from which man should protect himself namely: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony envy and sloth. Pride is an oftquoted vice in Greene's works as it often tends to draw his characters towards the evil. Christianity portrays pride as "an excessive and inordinate love of self which inclines Man to consider himself explicitly or implicitly, as his own absolute Master" (Courtois 179).