Murdoch’s works have often been plagued by generalizations based on her early writings; her reputation had often been idly denigrated by readers who were unable to take her fictional enterprise seriously. It was with the indomitable will and courage to insist on the demands for excellence – that Iris Murdoch stood out triumphantly. As Murdoch’s work developed past her initial slickness, the rewards of her hard work and diligent attention paid rich dividends. One of Murdoch’s important themes was ‘attention.’ She was well aware of the fact, that in the artistic and moral life one was bound to be misjudged. In The Black Prince, the protagonist Bradley Pearson, was pushed and denigrated by his fellow characters when they were allowed to write postscripts to his autobiographical tale. Only a discriminating reader could do justice to a Murdochian novel; for this the reader had to be more prepared to traverse through the moral maelstrom of many
of Murdoch’s novels. Similarly, Anne Cavidge in *Nuns and Soldiers* also had to listen at the end of the book to rude misreadings of her disciplined character and behaviour as she sat alone in a pub which represented the warmth and ordinariness of human society. The sincere silence and resilience of both Bradley and Anne in the face of those who judged them ruthlessly parallels the patience of Murdoch, who continued to strive as a serious writer, expanding the task of her art and wisdom.

Murdoch was no believer of a hand-written religion. She chose to cement her own doctrine which was rational and inspiring. She reinterpreted Christ so as to make him more approachable and even more lovable. This shall be discussed at length in this chapter with special reference to her novels *Henry and Cato* and *Nuns and Soldiers*. Murdoch was always inclined towards religious scrutiny even while dealing with an all – too secular milieu; the need to understand religion as a major subject was present in her earlier works as well. Elizabeth Dipple called Murdoch primarily a religious writer and further notes “the easiest and most pointed way of making this inclination evident is to examine how she works within a religious framework which
was obvious and unconcealed, rather than oblique and indirect as in many of the novels” (Pg. 243). Critics have too often described Murdoch “as inexorably falling into an opposition of two basic character types...the aspiring saint versus the would-be artist” (Dipple, 243). However, it would be more accurate to talk of Murdoch being immersed in the ‘sacred’ as opposed to the ‘profane.’ Henry in *Henry and Cato* and Tim in *Nuns and Soldiers* are ‘artists Manques,’ who are primarily interested in art in a failed professional way; opposed to them are Cato Forbes and Aune Cavidge – both with a religious vocation. Their lives were defined by their allegiance to the Church and to Christ. In both these novels Murdoch was exploring the complexity of sexuality and spirituality often found confusing and damaging.

Cato Forbes was a failed priest. His faith was disturbed during work in the East End, and then later, in a Paddington mission, he lost it completely. Simultaneously he fell disastrously in love with a seventeen year old Irish ‘baby crook’ called Beautiful Joe. On the other hand his friend Henry Marshalson, who by contrast perceived himself as a failed demon and failed artist, wished to renounce his inheritance. Cato decided to
abandon religion and tried to return to the cave; while Henry aspired, to renounce ostentatious abundance and live in the Sun. The novel was an accomplished mixture of farcical comedy and melodrama. Henry’s story was a comedy at which we laugh when violence fails, Cato’s a ‘tragedy’ at which we grieve when violence succeeds. Cato had rejected rationalism of his stern father, John Forbes, and had entered the order. He soon embraced Christian priesthood. His conversion to Catholicism made him believe ‘as if he had not only emerged from the cave, but was looking at the Sun.’ The role of emotion in the religious order was appropriately explored through the character of Cato to show both its striking indispensability and its jeopardy.

Although Cato was brought up in a strictly atheist upbringing, he had often discussed Jesus as “an old friend” with his father, but Cato was never attracted by the superstitious symbolism evoked around Christ. He was doing some postgraduate work, was perfectly well adjusted, had gained intellectual satisfaction and then “suddenly, with faculties which he had not been aware of, he experienced God” (HC,26). His “conversion therefore, ‘did not arise out of spiritual anguish,’ or
any pressing need for transcendent consolation" (HC,27). Yet it was present to him not as an idea but as a reality, as the whole of reality, with an invasion of spirit which seemed totally alien to his ‘personality’ as he had known it before, but which became “the very selfness of his self” (HC,27). Cato was no ‘sick soul’ and yet without any call or warning, he was invaded by Christ and with a sense of tumult, he passed from one order of reality to another. Cato was soon absorbed in the rhythmical life of the Church in London. Sometimes he felt “a cool sense of the tough old Adam in him... a certain kind of power... to be able to release a man from the burden of sin...” (HC,27)

Cato’s over zealousness in bestowing love was shaken when he took up a visiting role in a poor East End district of London. He witnessed for the first time:

The willfulness of vice as a part of everyday life, and the way in which despair and vice were, one. Just beyond the confines of ordinariness there were places where love could not enter (HC,31).
Suddenly Cato found himself to be powerless, he became ‘a figure of fun.’ He talked to Brenden about his traumatic experience of changing people gone haywire. The job of a priest was not easy ‘confessions became a kind of collusion.’ “They confess, and carry on infact they confess to carry on!” (HC,31) Cato soon realized that wickedness was not dull ‘its rather exciting.’

Murdoch effortlessly brought out the ups and downs, the pride and defeat of Cato’s life as a Priest. William James in *Varieties of Religious Experiences* describes “religious feeling as an enchantment not rationally or logically deductible from anything else, an absolute addition to the subject’s range of life” (Pg. 42). There are people for whom religious ideas mean nothing, there are also people incapable of imagining the invisible (God). Ramanathan in *Figures of Good* suggested, “emotion is the sine qua non religious experience (though not necessarily of the religiously regulated life)” (Pg. 43). Cato slowly realized “there was a great difference between visiting a poor area and going home to a clean book-lined room, and living in a poor area night and day. It was now impossible to escape from people” (HC,32). Suddenly Cato found himself captured in
an experience he was unprepared for. A truly fruitful experience would require the individual to feel pure joy of service for other fellow persons.

The real nature of such an immensely poignant experience was unveiled through the Brenden-Cato contrast and through what eventually happened to Cato. Slowly Cato found himself changing. Yet he hoped for grace to help him sustain his faith, and to believe in a God. Through Cato’s predicament Murdoch revealed the difficulty of ‘unselfing.’ So for a while the journey of Cato was stranded. To an outsider a priest’s life appeared admirable because the priest was an ultimate symbol of self control. To a lay man the priest was a picture of all goodliness. At the same time of his conversion, Cato had not felt any danger of being deluded; however, faith suddenly seemed to have been withdrawn. “Cato woke up one morning with the absolute conviction that he had been mistaken and that there was no God” (HC,34). At this point Brenden assured Cato that almost every individual embarking on a journey in search of truth or self-realization was left deluded by ‘the dark night of the soul.’
During his Paddington days, Cato had met Joe, who came from an ordinary Catholic family, and was the cleverest of the gang of boys. Cato had felt a sense of gratification at being Joe’s favourite. Cato knew that Joe was a delinquent, that he had left home and had become a revolutionary; however he always enjoyed Joe’s company and had time for him. Suddenly Cato found himself gripped in an unknown fear and made ‘feeble efforts to get rid of Joe.’ Cato tried to pass on Joe to Father Thomas but when Joe said “you’re the only one who has ever cared for me, Father, you’re the only one who can really see me at all” (HC,38). Cato was flattered and believed he would be able to bring sanity into the wavering behaviour of Joe. But soon Cato realized that he was trapped. Thus the saviour went on to become the sinner rather than the redeemer. While discussing the concept of good Murdoch mentioned: “it is a concept which is not easy to understand partly because it has so many false doubles, jumped-up inter-mediaries invented by human selfishness to make the difficult tasks of virtue look easier and more attractive” (SG,92).

Cato soon began to drown in the quick-sand of vanity and ego. On one hand he wanted desperately to save Joe and on the other hand weak-willed he thought “our relationship is a
dangerous muddle and nonsense. I must leave him absolutely and for good” (HC,40). Thus Cato dilly-dallied between saving himself and rescuing Joe. A verse from The Bhagavad Gita states:

Relinquish all activities unto Me!

Devoid of egotism and expectation,

with your attention concentrated on the soul, free from feverish worry, be engaged in the battle (of activity) (Ch 3, Verse 30).

Sincere God-seekers do not renounce true duties or the proper activities necessary to perform them. On the contrary, they overcome egotism, which makes one responsible as the doer. Such persons, work for God without worrying, knowing that it is He, who is working through them. But, very often renunciants become tempted to play the role of a guide, friend, saviour to others. Such an urgent need to save the other often leads to attachment as was the case with Cato. The wise man does not waste time in sermons but they help through precepts. In this way the wise man sets right standard for all who are lower on the
ladder of self-realization. The Gita repeatedly warned man against egoistic attachment, as attachment was the root cause of human suffering.

Cato’s conflict worked at two levels – one he was sincerely dedicated to the order and his feeling of love towards Joe could be accepted, if the intention was pure. Secondly, Cato thought he could not leave Joe to bottomless cynicism and perdition as Joe had nobody in this world, but himself, Cato, the priest. Cato decided to save Joe at the cost of leaving priesthood. Thus after years of being a fully ordained priest entirely at one with the rhythm of the Church, Cato’s faith vanished as abruptly as it had appeared. After weeks of apprehensions that gnawed into him like an illness, he woke up with the absolute conviction that there was no God. Extremely vulnerable, Cato’s inability to make sense of his emotional excesses led him into emotional jeopardy. It was this, rather than the homosexual nature of the attachment, that becomes the turning point of his downfall.

Brenden, Cato’s superior, expressed neither shock nor disapproval when he tells Cato, ‘Stop seeing that boy,’ Brenden
does not exhort out of prudery or moralistic rigidity but because

Cato’s love for Joe was too self-involved:

‘Stop seeing that boy.’

“I can’t, said Cato. He gripped the
door. ‘I can’t abandon
him–

‘You mean you can’t surrender this
pleasure. Are you doing him good? Is
he doing you good?

‘I’m the only person who can save
him.’

‘I doubt that. There is hope for him of
which you do not dream, because you
insist that you and only you must be
the vehicle. Let someone else have a
try. Give this to God. Make a hole in
your world, you may see something
through it.’

‘I can’t.’
‘You talk about truth – but it seems to me you are being totally frivolous and self-indulgent. It’s a dream, Cato, you are only saving him in a dream.’

‘Stop,’ said Cato. He pushed out of the room, and without saying anything more went into his bedroom and shut the door (HC,145).

The irony was such that, his ‘narcissistic passion’ for the boy left him at the mercy of Joe who bullied and dominated Cato beyond an unbelievable degree. When, Cato left the order Joe was horrified “you can’t be anything else but a priest. If you weren’t a priest, you’d be nothing” (HC,172). Joe went on to reject Cato and humiliated him:

If we went away together, Father, it would be muck – muck like you don’t know about… There’d be no joy there, Father, only hell, the only point would be money. I cared for you once, Father, but I cared for the other
you, the one that wore a robe and had nothing, not even an electric kettle (HC, 192).

Cato imagined of a different world for himself and Joe. He wanted urgently to taste the sweetness of freedom and joy. However, no sooner did Cato leave behind the order, than he found himself bound and confined. Joe kidnapped and imprisoned Cato. He threatened Cato saying that he was part of a murderous gang. He demanded Henry’s money and then Cato’s sister Colette. Cato was astonished by Joe’s bizarre behaviour but was helpless. Thus Cato went on to become a victim rather than the rescuer. What followed was a quick action. At Joe’s behest Cato wrote to Henry asking for a hundred thousand pounds and then again to Colette begging her to come if she wanted him to be alive. Joe attempted to seduce her; Cato wakes up only to hear screams which he instantly recognized as Colette’s cry, then with all his might he broke down the locked doors of his room, brought down a piece of bathroom pipe on Joe’s head and killed him. The worse followed, not only has he killed the boy he loved so ardently but discovered that Joe worked alone and not with any gang.
Cato survived a living death worse than anything he could have imagined; he has killed the boy he longed to save. The punishment too severe; the sin was indulgent love. Painfully, the learning process begins after the devastation of the myth. Cato had lost all, along with his faith. But the kind of faith he held on to had to go. Ramanathan explains, "Faith cannot be a matter of emotion or even intellect alone; it is understanding and action, to be tested on the anvil of pain and horror" (Pg. 150). Cato was blinded by ego and his emotional faith was converted into a self-feeding and the real, the good began to recede. The same Cato who was once ‘invaded by Christ’ was now filled, with a void a ‘spiritual deprivation.’ Almost unknowingly Cato thought:

As... he gazed into the darkness and the darkness was not dead but terribly alive, seething and boiling with life. And in the midst of it all he saw, smiling at him, the radiant face of Beautiful Joe (HC,146).

This passage indicates that the image of Christ was held by Cato in what Murdoch referred to as “the warm, messy empirical
Brenden, tried to help Cato understand ‘truth’ he says “Christ isn’t a sort of once-and-for-all pill that you take. He’s a principle of change in human life” (HC,143). However for Cato, Christ was not worth any purpose, or meaning as compared with his new-found certainty. Brenden exhorted Cato “pray all the same. Damn it you’re a priest not a schoolgirl” (HC,143). Fr. Brenden Craddock was the yardstick by which all that happened in the novel was measured. Brenden defined, with care, the concept of faith, security, freedom and remained unmoved as a witness for the mysteries of God: “The spiritual life is a long strange business and you’ve got to be quiet and docile enough to go on learning” (HC,144).

Brenden exuded an attractiveness that was dedicated entirely to good – the good named God. Murdoch defined God as “a single perfect transcendent, non-representable and necessarily real object of attention” (SG,55). Brenden and Cato shared a deeply closed relationship. In every crisis Cato turned to Brenden even if he did not always follow his advice. Brenden dealt with Cato’s dilemmas, without taking a feverish interest, he remained detached. When Brenden came on a flying visit, Cato said to him:
Oh by the way, I’ve lost my faith.’
‘Rubbish,’ ‘God is gone. There is no
God, no Christ, nothing.’ ‘I expected
this.’ ‘You expect everything.’ ‘That
darkness comes to us all.’ I knew
you’d say that. But suppose the
darkness is real, true?’ “Hold on.’
(HC,34).

Much later when Cato fell further into the whirlpool of crisis
Brendan humbly acknowledged that perhaps he may have been
mistaken and pleaded with Cato to stay:

Don’t go Cato, it’s important that you
shouldn’t go. I said everything wrong.
I was tired. I should have waited.
Nothing I said matters, not the details
I mean. May be I’m wrong about the
boy. I don’t know enough, may be
everything I said was phoney. But
don’t go away from this. Wait, stay,
rest (HC,146).
Slowly, Brenden admitted to his powerlessness to change Cato’s mind. There was no doubt that Brenden had no personal reasons for asking Cato to stay. Yet Brenden realized that his relationship with Cato is important and before it went on to become an attachment he must learn to let go, release and renounce that which bound him. Brenden then decided to leave for India. Cato speaks first:

‘So I won’t see you before you go?’

‘No.’

‘Shall I come and see you in Calcutta if I can raise, the money from somewhere.’

‘Well better not.’

There was silence for a moment.

Cato put on his coat. ‘So you’re giving me up too.’

‘I’m giving you up too.’

They faced each other (HC,339).
Here in the conversation between the two it was Cato who expresses need, but Brenden’s brief answers suggested a disciplining of emotion. Brenden’s ‘I’m Giving you up too’ suggested that it was a sacrifice. Brenden’s intuitive intelligence helped him to perceive the danger in playing saviour to Cato and he preferred to step aside. Thus he played an important role in Cato’s life and the rest he left it to Christ. This fact was clearly indicated by the gift of his beautiful, Spanish crucifix to Cato. Brenden advised Cato to surrender the matter of Beautiful Joe to Christ. To some extent Brenden was successful in disciplining himself. Unlike Cato he had learned through trials and errors. Brenden had mastered ways to be unaffected especially when Cato confessed about his love for Beautiful Joe. His reaction to this was, ‘the angel with hexagonal glasses? Don’t worry, we all fall for lovely boys.’ These lines displayed Brenden’s immense patience with oneself as well as with others. This point can be further stressed by understanding it a little more clearly in the light of The Bhagavad Gita:

Sages call “Sanyasa” the renunciation of all actions done with desire. The wise declare that “tyaga” is the
The above verse indicated that both 'Sanyasa' and 'Tyaga' in common parlance meant renunciation, the learning or giving up of worldly objects and pursuits, especially by those who take the holy vows as Monks, Priests, Nuns. More than merely physical or material abandonment, the Gita advocated a deeper case for true renunciation as requiring an inner non-attachment. A subtle distinction, is made between ‘Sanyasa’ and ‘Tyaga’ to define two aspects of renunciation. Sri Paramahansa Yogananda defined “Sannyasa” – ‘renunciation the abandonment of the desires and selfish motives that are the usual instigators of actions.’ “Tyaga” – ‘renunciation means the relinquishment of, or non-identification with, the inevitable fruits, or results, that accrue from all actions.’ It may be noted here that the Gita doesn’t advocate the renunciation of action itself, for action is a ‘veritable’ necessity. The perfect kind of renunciation is the ability to work or save without personal desire, or for attaining fruits of actions.
Brenden had started on his actual journey of ‘Sanyasa’ and ‘tyaga,’ a journey towards ‘unselfing’ that allowed the soul to progress towards self-realization. Brenden’s renunciation of the fruits of all actions was followed for the singular purpose of finding God, in preference to getting entangled with worldly ambitions. Brenden’s decision to go to India could be read as a visible sign of the shift in his understanding, of his recognition of the danger in ‘understanding too much.’ A conversation between Cato and Brenden will highlight the above point:

‘After all you believe in a personal God.’

Brenden was silent.

‘Well, you do, don’t you?

After a moment Brenden said, “that’s another picture. We deal in the idea of persons, we have to. But God is unimaginable and incomprehensible and nameless…

‘You talk of giving up.’
‘I don’t just talk of it, I am giving up.’

... Do you believe in God?

‘It’s impossible to answer a question truly unless you know what the question means to the questioner.’

‘Oh do stop being subtle. If you don’t know whether God is a person what happens to your Christology?’

‘I let Christ look after my Christology’ (HC,337).

Being a Catholic Priest, Brenden was surrounded by structures, dogmas and images but like a true priest he tried to look beyond them. Slowly, there was a clear recognition and understanding in Brenden to leave all images behind – the Eucharist, the Cross, the Gospel narrative. When Cato raised doubts about dogmas Brenden replied:

There are worlds and worlds beyond the dogma.
How far can Christianity go beyond the dogma and still remain a religion?

As far as the human soul extends (HC,156).

Brenden’s answer revealed a much wider interpretation of the scripture, and his own universality in looking for God beyond the limited framework of religion. In the end Brenden even decided to renounce the crucifix. Slowly Brenden fiddled in the cupboard and brought out a dark green velvet covered box. He opened it. The ivory Spanish crucifix was nestling inside.

‘Oh Brenden - aren’t you taking it?’

‘No I wanted you to have it…’

‘Oh-thank you- it’s so beautiful?

‘Good-bye then – God bless you’ (HC,340).

Brenden’s decision to give up or give away the Crucifix was suggestive of ‘demythologization.’ To be attached to objects reduced God to being subjective and merely a psychological experience. What made Brenden credible was that he does not
make light of Cato’s doubts. He recognized and understood calmly the impossibility of ever trying to change the other. He left Cato to fight his own battles:

I am not belittling your “intellectual crisis.” We are all intellectuals, we have to undergo these crises, in fact to undergo them is an essential part of our task. We have to suffer for God in the intellect, go on and on taking the strain. Of course we can never be altogether in the truth, given the distance between man and God how could we be? Our truth is at best a shadowy reflection, yet we must never stop trying to understand (HC, 161).

Brenden was credible because he took into account the paradoxes and dichotomies without any entanglements. Change consisted in ‘unselfing’ and the ultimate vanquishing of the ego. Murdoch, clearly, stated that the selfish self was the cause of all that went
wrong in life. To work diligently without succor was at times both formidable and frightening a task. Brenden says:

The ego in you is appalled. It’s like a
death sentence. It is a death sentence.
Not pain, not mortification, but death.
That’s what chills you. That’s what
you experience when you say there is
no one there (HC,144).

Any individual who lived without cultivating and employing the innate powers of wisdom and spiritual discrimination was pulled into the whirlpool of misery, ignorance, destructive obsessions and unhappiness. Through Brendon the nature of faith was defined. And faith for Brenden meant abandonment of all human comfort and security. Brenden who followed Christianity diligently was ready to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Brenden realized that mental renunciation was of primary importance in the attainment of self-realization. Further reference from the Bible would throw light on the above comment:
‘And it came to pass, that as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, ‘Lord, I will follow the whithersoever thou goest.’

And Jesus said unto him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.”

And he said unto another, “Follow me.”

But he said, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.”

Jesus said unto him, “Let the dead bury their dead.”

And another also said, “Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.”

And Jesus said unto him, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God” Luke 9:49-62.
Darkness can be dispelled only by light. And enlightened masters such as Christ or the Buddha never identified with the physical form or mundane collectibles. As the animals are at home in their dens and birds in their nests, so the man of limited consciousness often restricts himself to the particular. On the other hand, the liberated man is never an alien anywhere. Thus the psychology of renunciation is not escape or fleeing from one’s duties, it is the art of evicting from the mind confrontational material desires in order to move closer towards God-realization. “Ordinary human consciousness is a tissue of illusion” (HC,144). From this self importance or ‘status’ arises the need to be fed with praise. Real awakening is to release self-centred conditioning where consciousness is liberated. Cato, bound by his need for beautiful Joe believed leaving the order as an exercise of freedom. Cato’s case was of special interest because his love for Joe began as ‘filial or charitable love’ which after took a disastrous turn and became erotic love:

Falling in love is egoism, it’s being obsessed by images of the beloved, images of oneself. It’s the greatest pain and the greatest paradox of all
that personal love has to break at some point, the ego has to break, something absolutely natural and seemingly good, seemingly perhaps the only good, has to be given up. After that there’s darkness and silence and space. And God is there (HC,336).

Cato failed to clarify the nature of love. Murdoch comments “...human love is normally too profoundly possessive and also too mechanical to be a place of vision” (HC,75) Thus Brenden’s argument was based upon the crucial issue of the ego. He told Cato that the guilt and unhappiness he felt after killing Joe was also the manifestations of the stubborn ego:

Your guilt is vanity, it’s to do with that self-esteem you were talking about, which you haven’t really lost at all, it’s only wounded. Repent and let these things pass from you (HC,336).
Cato’s real experience of God could only begin only when he learnt to let go of the images: “Where the images end you fall into the abyss, but it is the abyss of faith. When you have nothing left you have nothing left but hope” (HC,336). Cato found himself totally damned: “Without Christ I can’t. Without the bloody machinery I can’t...I feel damned, I loved the boy and I led him astray and I killed him” (HC,336). To this Brenden consoles Cato and asks him to keep his faith for, ‘the highest form of good is located in surrender, silence and loving acceptance of things as they are.’ He further tells Cato, “the spiritual life is a long strange business and you’ve got to be quiet and docile enough to go on learning” (HC,144). This resilience which Brenden exemplified becomes the final journey towards self-realization. A verse from The Gita will stress this point more accurately:

Whosoever shall impart to my devotees the supreme secret knowledge, with utmost devotion to Me, shall without doubt come unto Me. Not any among men performs more priceless service to Me than he; in all the world there shall be none
A sincere seeker who feels the omnipresent self in the little ‘Myself’ and by actual spiritual perception was able to impart truth to other soul-seekers is indeed blessed. Thus though God transcended all misery and is all-blessed, he is conscious of the sufferings of his children and undergoes with them the excruciating tests of delusive existence. Therefore, dearest to God is the saint who strives to free others from delusion and bring them back to the realization of their forgotten inherent divinity. The Bible teaching may also be aptly quoted ‘Love God with all thy soul’ – that is love God with all the intuitive perception of soul-realization; ‘and love thy neighbour as thyself.’ Here caution is called for to safeguard against intrusion by ego. In the initial good intention to serve others spiritually one might become prideful in playing the role of a saviour. This is why The Gita stresses that any service done must be with utmost devotion to God, not out of ego’s love for recognition and power. Thus in a way an enthusiast like Cato who tries to save other souls without having saved his own may be a good person, but his actions do
not lead to self-realization or liberation if he retains egotism in his desire to be an instrument of good. However, like Brenden if one is deeply sincere in one’s own endeavours to find God, and at the same time in all humility tries to bring others to Him, that action is admirable and liberating. Such action leads towards self-realization.

Brenden as a saviour stood as the epitome of moral and spiritual gracefulness. Cato on the other hand was further away from that selfless understanding, yet striving to begin again. Elizabeth Dipple comments: “The symbolic message of the Titian painting is however that the novel ends where it had begun, with Cato walking into the dark rain with an object in his pocket. The turn from gun to crucifix illustrates the dominant progress of the book, from violence to quiet…” (Pg. 261-62). Having left the order, Cato towards the end stood as a symbol pointing to the ‘unparaphrasable reality even more significantly’ than seen at the beginning, wearing a cassock, set on saving Beautiful Joe and by throwing his gun into the Thames. Cato had none of the old beliefs left except the Spanish crucifix. Cato found it difficult to understand Christ because he tried to grasp the ‘beyond’ through his intellect, while Brenden learnt to drop the intellect. Cato
failed to recognize the nature of love, somewhere along he tried
to define love according to his understanding. After all the Ten
Commandments clearly states ‘Love one another as I have loved
you.’ In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch has distinguished
between mechanical love and love which is concerned with
compassion, rather than the self (SG,75). Cato failed to keep the
boundaries clear. He was confused between ‘the supreme and
only good, with the supreme good itself.’ Robert Johann
distinguishes between love as an emotion and love as a task, and
remarked that, “love as an emotion or a felt attraction for some
particular good is an insufficient guide for the total orientation of
our lives” (Pg. 39). Cato’s vision and understanding of love was
blurred and therefore, he stumbled.

The road towards self-realization lies in the loving
acceptance of things as they were. When Cato asked Brendon as
to how he came to God and religion, Brendon replied that he had
the advantage of growing up with a saint, who was none other
than his mother, ‘She was the sort of saint no one ever notices or
sees, she was almost invisible.’ By reducing the self to a state of
nothingness, only can ego be annihilated. True humility desires
nothing and steadfastly moves towards liberation. Iris Murdoch
in *The Sovereignty of Good* says that unselfish mothers of larger families are likely to be those in whom most good resides (SG,53). Murdoch persistently emphasized on the need to discipline and purify the consciousness through continuous willed effort. This belief is carried over into *Nuns and soldiers* and placed once again in a Christian context. Murdoch not only insisted on the need for ‘Good’ but stressed upon that goodness must be surrendered in itself completely. So, when Anne joined the convent she was deeply focused on ‘holiness’ or ‘goodness’ as her chief goal, “the idea of holiness of becoming good in some more positive sense, naturally gained power in her mind in the earlier years in the convent” (NS, 58). But soon to her dismay she discovered that the path she had chosen somehow led her away from knowing Christ and could be found only if abandoned totally. Anne knew just one thing for sure that she had to leave the order, “I must be alone, she thought, with no plan and no vision, homeless and invisible, a wanderer, a no one” (NS,65).

Thus Anne began to seek refuge in the self. However, life out of the convent was not easy for Anne. She found herself falling in love with Peter, but she realizes that loving Peter would always be a one-sided love as Peter was in love with Gertrude. Anne
knows that she will have to love Peter from a distance, love him selflessly. Like Cato there was a hint of an involvement of some kind in the convent, but nothing seriously dangerous to create an emotional tide. Anne, unlike Cato, was not at the mercy of her emotions, and Anne courageously left the convent as she was convinced that the convent was not the right place for her as a seeker.

Now Anne was determined to know Christ. And Christ appeared to her and reinterpreted himself, he rejected the role of being a saviour, which Christians have been made to believe since time immemorial and instead he told Anne that much needed to be done alone. Just as Brenden’s Christ in *Henry and Cato* was allowed to look after his Christology, Anne’s Christ gently refused all responsibility. She knew she must learn to fight her own battles.

The real meaning of Christ then was selfless love, all other layers had to be kept aside in order to understand truth. Christ undertook the task of tutoring Anne. Here it may be noted that Anne’s visitation of Christ was derived directly from Julian of
Norwich, the fourteenth century mystic. Also Murdoch had modified Julian in ways essential to her purpose of retaining the central context being that of love. Julian’s famous line ‘All shall be well’ often occurs in almost every Murdochian novel in different context. In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch says: “If I attend properly I will have no choice and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at” (SG,40). Although Murdoch’s world was inhabited both by good and evil, she coaxed her characters to be absorbed at the centre and all that was of evil would simply vanish. Of course it was not an easy solution but perhaps the only way out of daily turmoils. Julian of Norwich also expressed doubt and Christ, who appeared to her in sixteen showings became the centre of a trinity ‘All- might, All-wisdom, and All - love.’ Julian still had her doubts and asked Christ:

> How might all be well for the great hurt that is come by sin to the creature? to which Christ says but for failing of love on our part, therefore is all our travail (RDL,76).
Evil or bad was nothing but extreme wretchedness arising from a sinful inability to love. Taking a cue from this, Murdoch wrote a scene in which Christ actually appeared to Anne. *In Nuns and Soldiers* when Anne and the Abbess were discussing Anne’s spiritual state and decision to leave the convent, Anne said “there was no great positive showing here, no revelation of a new task” (NS,62). The Abbess persuaded her to retain a connection with them to be an ‘anchoress.’ ‘Anchoress’ was also used in connection with Julian. She was described as ‘Anchoress of Norwich.’ Also later on in the novel Anne wondered whether she could really be an anchoress. (NS,498).

Then Anne witnessed the visitation of Christ, which was clearly based on Julian of Norwich. Much care was taken by the author to establish the fact that the visitation was not a dream. The whole scene was written to give an effect of a dream. The two beautiful statues of angels stepping down their pedestals in an eighteenth-century rose-garden, leading the way and then disappearing, leaving Anne alone listening to the footsteps which she recognized as that of Christ – everything appeared dreamlike and yet when she woke up she found herself in her own bedroom.
And then she spotted someone standing in her kitchen in the bright light of the early summer morning. She recognized the person as Christ. Jesus Christ came to Anne Cavidge in a vision. “The visitation began in a dream, but then gained a very undreamlike reality” (NS,293). Her hand felt raw, almost as if it was burnt, where it had brushed Christ’s sleeve, and will not heal. Later, Anne was left wondering whether it was a dream or hallucination. But a deep inner faith convinced Anne that she was not dreaming as she recalled how Jesus looked:

He had a strangely elongated head and a strange pallor... he was beardless, with wispy blond hair, not very long and he was thin and of medium height, dressed in shapeless yellowish-white trousers and a shirt of similar colour... Though the shape of the head seemed almost grotesque, the face was beautiful (NS,295).

Murdoch’s Christ looked ‘wholly contemporary’ yet ‘other and himself.’ Murdoch’s Christ was a figure of charm. Her Jesus was
loving and humorous and appreciated wit, he also managed to laugh. His conversation with Anne reflected on that which was serious but not solemn. When Christ asked Anne, ‘what am I holding in my hand?’ she replied: ‘A hazel-nut, Sir.’ But he said no and puts down on the table an elliptical grey stone: Anne stared at the stone.

Then she said slowly,

‘Is it so small?’

‘Yes, Anne.’

‘Everything that is, so little –’

‘Yes.’

‘But, Sir – how can it not perish, how can it be, if all this –’

‘Ah, my dear child, you want some wonderful answers, don’t you?’

‘Yes thought Anne, I do.

‘Have you not been shown enough?’

‘No, No, I want more’, said Anne, ‘more, more. Tell me –

What are you...where are you –’
ambiguous. Concentrating keenly, Anne thought about Christianity and its idea of suffering, Anne searched Christ’s hands for the scars of his wounds only to find Christ’s hands unscarred. She inquired:

‘Your wounds, Sir –’

‘I have no wounds. My wounds are imaginary.’

... “You do not need to see my wounds. If there are wounds they have healed. If there was suffering it has gone and is nothing” (NS, 296).

The suffering of Christ was not meant to be a spectacle to be watched by a baffled humanity. In no certain term does Murdoch underplay the significance of a suffering Christ, because she clearly understood the dangerous complacency with which it could fall into consoling reverie. It may also be pointed out that ‘the Judaeo-Christian mystique clearly recognized the prophetic mission of suffering.’ The message from the prophet Jeremiah through Isaiah and coming to Christ, was that suffering becomes an integral part of purification, in order to lead an authentic life of
goodness. Murdoch’s belief does not negate this. But she does strongly decry both in *Nuns and Soldiers*, as well as in *The Sovereignty of Good* an easy acceptance of the atonement, and the sentimental outcry of the image of Christ’s sufferings. In *Henry and Cato* Brenden Craddock made an observation that Christianity distracted the attention from death because it emphasized on suffering which goes on to breed beautiful images (HC,371). While the dying Guy, Gertrude’s husband, in *Nuns and Soldiers* recalled that Christianity was soft, sentimental, magical it denied death, and it changed death into an interesting kind of suffering. In *The Sovereignty of Good* Murdoch commented: “It is very difficult to concentrate attention upon suffering and sin, in others or in oneself, without falsifying the picture in some way while making it bearable” (SG,73).Suffering, becomes a harsh reminder to train the self towards moral improvement, but through Christ’s conversation with Anne in *Nuns and Soldiers* it need not be an end in itself.

Thus Murdoch had created a Christ who suddenly becomes so real, so reachable a Christ so universal, a Christ who stepped out of the Bible and was seen mingling with ordinary
people. The prophets of the world do not come to foster inimical doctrinal divisions, therefore, their teachings should not be used toward that end. It would be something of a misnomer even to refer to the New Testament as the “Christian” Bible, for it does not belong exclusively to any one sect. Truth was meant for the blessing and upliftment of the entire human race. As the ‘Christ consciousness’ was universal and Jesus Christ belonged to all’ Murdoch also echoed a similar understanding as her philosophy dictates ‘to explore one’s own temperament, and yet at the same time to attempt to discover the truth.’

For almost every Christian, Christ is a symbol or image of suffering. But in *Nuns and Soldiers* Murdoch’s Christ is constantly working hard to transfer attention from pain and suffering to that of love. When Anne persuades Christ to show her his wrists, he affirmed “Yes pain is a scandal and a task, but it is a shadow that passes” (NS,291). Then Anne hesitatingly asked if pain is not the point, and Christ replied lightly, “the point? No, though it has proved so interesting to you all” (NS 291).
Murdoch rightly suggested that Christ’s redemptive suffering was not ‘the point’ rather Love was the ‘point.’ It was a call to nurture a love so profound as Christ nurtured. Of course, such love has no room for romantic indulgence or sentimentality so when Anne shed blinding tears, Christ said to her: “Don’t cry. Are you really so sentimental? Art thou well-paid that ever suffe4red I passion for thee? If I could have suffered more, I would have suffered more” (NS,293). Thus we see Murdoch’s Christ shrugged off the entire event of suffering and cheerfully agreed to suffer again if the need arose. Making too much of suffering was a kind of self indulgence which Murdoch objected to. And when Anne recollected the memory of the passion in horror, Murdoch described Anne’s reaction thus:

She was amazed to find her imagination flinching from his sufferings upon the cross as from an abominable, hardly conceivable torture. It was now like something she had read about in the newspaper, terrible things which gangsters or
terrorists did to their victims... How there were no angels, no father, only a man hanging up in an unspeakable anguish, of which for the first time she was able to grasp the details. She felt appalled and sick (NS,355).

Christ stressed not upon suffering but death: Suffering is a task. Death is a showing (NS,355). What Christ meant by death was the ability to let the ego or the vices die in order to cultivate a sense of virtue. Anne gradually begins to understand Christ and Christianity.

Christ in the *Nuns and Soldiers* deliberately moved away from his traditional identification. Anne begged for the great things of conventional Christianity – to be saved, to become good, to be made clean, but these were treated coolly and negatively. Anne wanted to know everything and asked for instructions on the route to salvation and Christ answered nonchalantly ‘Oh yes.’ Then she went on to ask how to be ‘saved’? Christ looked at her and said ‘you must do it all yourself, you know.’ Anne reacted sharply ‘what do you mean?’
Christianity makes one believe that Christ suffered and died on the Cross to save mankind from an Ocean of sins. But here was a Christ, who tells very plainly, that Christ is, yet the task is not easy, much must be done by the self. Christ further added:

‘I prove nothing, Anne…’ ‘What more do you want? A miracle?’

‘Yes,’ she said

You must be the miracle-worker, little one. You must be the proof. The work is yours’ (NS,299).

Anne in a frantic appeal asks Christ how she could become good? She also told “I want to be made clean like you promised, I want to be washed whiter than snow” (NS,299). Murdoch brought out the sentimental and traditional metaphoric desires in all true seekers, who at the beginning were always full of questions, doubts and erratic bouts of love for the divine. Elizabeth Dipple has explained beautifully that the vision’s revelation connects to the central nexus of Murdoch’s thinking about the good and the nature of the moral life:
Death, reality and a just image of Christ are closely connected, the psyche goes forward to the great teaching which is given only by death rather than by consolations of suffering; the good is not attainable; clean innocence which the spirit longs for is impossible and even sentimental; absolute human responsibility resides in the continuous flow of disciplining oneself to act rightly rather than in any hope of an outside redemption or miracle (Pg. 326).

Anne’s vision was connected to the major ideas of *Nuns and Soldiers* such as her friend Gertrude’s husband Guy’s death, the assertion of homelessness, alienation, and separation which was crucial to the novel’s teaching. The vision left Anne bewildered and puzzled. She longed to put this strange Christ who appeared so real in a comprehensible place. But what Anne needed to learn
was that 'Christ-ness' or Oneness can be grasped only by inner communion and not by rationalization. Anne had to learn self-realization which meant to attain single-minded consciousness with Christ, only then could Christ become comprehensible.

At several points in *Nuns and Soldiers* there were subtle links between Anne and the intense experience of the historical Mary Magdalene. Anne in her early Cambridge days spent “most of her time and energy and thought and feelings was devoted to love affairs, to an extent which she felt bound to conceal even from her women friends” (NS,56-7). And finally when she met Christ she wanted to hold on to him lest she was left all alone she cried out:

I can’t bear it, I can’t bear it! She reached out her dripping hands towards him. He said gently, Love me if you must, my dear, but don’t touch me (NS,299).

Overwhelmed, Anne thought is he real, is this real flesh? Oh I love him
so much, I must touch him, I must
kneel and embrace his knees, lie and
kiss his feet (NS,299).

These lines so very poignantly reminded, one of Mary Magdalene
who washed the feet of Christ with her tears and wiped it with her
long tresses. It is Christ who awakened Anne but not through
miracles. His nature was love and he represented simply the
loving human heart. And it was this pure love of Christ that
brought an inner transformation in Mary Magdalene. In order to
connect to the higher self, Anne must first learn to convert her
sorrow into inner introspection. For, as the self learns to discover
the greatest good within, all fragmented pieces of doubt become
one and gradually moves towards the still point of light.

From the moment Anne re-enters the world, there was a
knot that she needed to untie through constant willed effort.
Firstly, Anne’s old friendship with Gertrude was revived when
she left the convent. She went to stay with Gertrude only as a
temporary refugee but continued to stay on at Gertrude’s
insistence. Later there was an extraordinary scene in which Anne
plunged naked into the sea only to be rescued by a panic-stricken Gertrude. The scene brought out Anne’s undercurrent of sexuality and emotional dependence. This was further highlighted in the novel when Anne went to meet Daisy who was Gertrude’s present husband Tim’s previous girl friend:

So you’re an old friend of Gertrude’s,
I see. Now I’ve got it. The intrusive old girl friend. You’re in love with Gertrude! That’s why you’re so filled with spite and envy, coming round here and insinuating things and asking questions! Tell bloody Gertrude to ask her own bloody questions! Get out! Jesus bloody Christ, as if I hadn’t enough trouble without being persecuted by jealous nuns suffering from sexual deprivation! Oh get out! (NS,331)
Daisy lashed out at Anne with venom and disgust; Anne was shocked and left in tears. What Anne failed to realize was that her overprotective love for Gertrude could have caused more harm than help. The muddle was further intensified when Anne falls hopelessly in love with Peter (who is in love with Gertrude, who is in love with Tim, who was once in love with Daisy). Murdoch’s point of such a pursuit was to show the unreliability of erotic love. Anne had to find a way out of the world’s muddle and find a path for herself. Anne tried to surrender her love for Peter but was gripped by a fierce longing to possess Peter, especially after Gertrude and Tim had reunited after a brief separation. With Gertrude back with Tim, Anne could claim Peter or so she thinks ‘come on, Peter, you’re mine now,’ which he is too upset to hear, and actually takes him away from France to England, laughing with joy (NS,437). However, as Brenden said to Cato in Henry and Cato, even this absolutely natural human good had to be given up by Anne. Much to her dismay, Anne realized that Peter and Gertrude want freedom to be just for one another, even as Gertrude conveniently enjoyed the comfort of her marriage to Tim.
Love then is to let go, let live. It is not assertive love that demonstrates eternal union. Instead, that love is the highest, purest which exists without hope of reciprocation or union. Murdoch says in *the Sovereignty of Good*:

> The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*. The difficulty is to keep the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self-pity resentment fantasy and despair (SG,91).

The fact that Anne found it difficult to let go was brought out by her sullenness and her headaches which almost became unbearable. She possessively longed for Peter. Soon she realized that her Peter belonged to Gertrude and she must learn to survive on her own. She recalled Gertrude's words "in order to survive a terrible loss one has to become another person..." (NS,507) Thus...
Anne learned to comprehend the meaning of her visitation when Christ told her “the work is yours” (NS, 299). Anne soon realized:

She was only just now receiving the full shock waves of her departure from the convent, the full violence of that amazing act, itself like a kind of bereavement, whose full consequences remained still so obscure (NS, 507).

She accepted that the mess of human relationships had to be understood without any selfish attachments. Also later on she would see her mad love for Peter as merely another episode in the large canvas of change. It was only proper loving that would lead to stillness and good. Murdoch through her characters showed that a fine line had to be drawn between self-awareness and self-obsession, because if left unattended, one could easily become a prey.

Murdoch has always been concerned with morality. And the Christ-Anne exchange was a description of ‘a kind of moral
psychology' rather than that which appeared mystical. Then the question that arises is if all work must be done by the self, where is the need for God or transcendent good? Murdoch answers this dilemma with great caution in *The Sovereignty of Good*: But now it may be asked: are you speaking of a transcendent authority or of a psychological device? And she goes on to answer: ‘That the idea of the transcendent, in some form or the other, belongs to morality…’ In the dialogue on religion in Acastos, she says: I think it means that we’ve drawn to the idea of a sort of central good – something very real – after all morality feels more like discovering something than just inventing it – and we want to sort of, assert this central thing (Pg. 85). Thus at one level Christ perhaps stood for the idealistic Philosopher, preoccupied with helping seekers turn inward. But, for ordinary seekers such as Anne or even Cato for that matter, need more than just the pure, naked concept, which cannot be wholly explained in rational terms. Perhaps, this explained why Murdoch chose to use the image of Christ, and more so a Christ associated with mystical experience. Murdoch also firmly believed that Mysticism at some point provided the much needed background for moral activity. She wrote in *The Sovereignty of Good*: 

239
Morality has always been connected with religion and religion with mysticism. The disappearance of the middle term leaves morality in a situation which is certainly more difficult but essentially the same. The background to morals is properly some sort of mysticism, if this is meant a non-dogmatic, essentially unformulated faith in the reality of good (Pg. 74).

Anne’s mystical experience could be looked at as the soul’s ability to understand moral endeavour and guide it towards self-realization. Anne’s answer to Christ, ‘Love is my meaning,’ holds great significance considering the intricate relationships that cross one another through the pattern of the novel. Anne in her encounter with Christ began to slowly understand that kind of love, which holds meaning such as giving up Peter, Gertrude and the warmth of belonging to places and people. In Anne’s words: ‘Because I am given to the religious life’... “I have got to be
alone" (HC,479). These lines connected Anne’s vision to the major ideas of Nuns and Soldiers: the assertion of homelessness, separation and a kind of alienation that was so crucial to the novel’s meaning. Suddenly Anne was comfortable to be ‘homeless and free.’ She had left the convent because it was a home. The moment one finds courage to give up, one becomes instantly liberated and no longer craves for ownership or possessions. Jesus expressed this absolute freedom and required of his apostles, also, the strict life of renunciation.

A God-surrendered, God-supported life has always been extolled by some of India’s greatest prophets. Jesus also laid emphasis on ‘devotion and renunciation.’ This was the message of Nuns and Soldiers. In the visitation, Christ extolled Anne to cast aside all encumbrances of identification with a limited body, mind, and ego, acknowledging no other self but spirit. Jesus stood as a symbol of universal love and expanded this love beyond the exclusivity of family ties and attachments. Just as Jesus asked ‘Who is my mother? who are my brethren?’ Likewise, sages in India too have expressed transcendent freedom: ‘No birth, no death, no caste have I. Father, Mother,
have I none. I am he, I am he; blessed spirit, I am he.’ Similarly
Jesus said: ‘I and my Father are one.’ Anne’s Christ had made her
see the universe in a small stone. She was not sure of God, “but
Christ lived, at any rate her Christ lived, her nomadic cosmic
Christ, uniquely hers, focused upon her alone by all the rays of
being” (HC,509). All in all, the whole experience was aimed at
drawing Anne out of herself, in the Murdochian sense of taking
away her attention from self-indulgence to a higher reality.

Murdoch refused to accept the traditional concept of a
suffering Christ willing to salvage fallen souls. Instead
Murdoch’s Christ was forthright in telling Anne ‘The work is
yours.’ Like every Christian, Anne also entered the convent
believing that a personal God would take charge of her life. But it
was only after the visitation that Anne emerged with clearer sense
of religion and more so of herself. Anne understood that God was
not merely a concept found outside but God is within. Gradually,
Anne became capable of accepting the self, the world, the people,
her surrounding just as they were. She also understood the
meaning of love. For only love could help one transcend from the
ordinary to the sublime. Anne’s Christ told her that he was no
magician, and she tried to understand him accurately, his authority seemed slight:

He still seemed to her at times like a sprite, a fairy thing, a lost vagrant spiritual being. Perhaps he was in some sense local, a little God left behind by a lost cult which even he had forgotten. Or was not his 'locality' determined rather by the whole universe beaming its radiance in upon moral soul? She remained persuaded that he was her Christ, hers alone. He's all I've got, she thought (HC,362).

It would not be right to presume that the spiritual enlightenment of one person could redeem the whole of humanity. Anne learnt that, no one else but she herself was responsible, as was every human being in Murdoch’s work. Since Anne’s Christ denied that he was never a magician, his presence failed to give Anne any
wonderful answers she looked for, and it was clear from the novel that if all shall be well, it shall be so only through moral discipline and virtue available in human beings. Thus, Anne’s Christ won no victories and promised no miracles. Anne had to attempt to go into an impersonal void: “At least she knew that she must now seek solitude, innocence and the silence of being totally uninteresting” (HC,508). She realized that she left the convent because it had become a home: “Everyone that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or Mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Mathew,19:29).

Thus Anne had to learn to separate her limited consciousness of home, I-Me-Mine identity completely. She also learnt happiness sought anywhere but in God tends to corruption. And though men cast themselves into the darkest abyss of God-forgetfulness, spurning God in favour of rampant material gratification, yet, man is ultimately received by the magnetic pull of God’s Love. Murdoch in Metaphysics as a guide to Morals comments: ‘Alienation leads on to a higher unity,’ ‘God is the future of man.’ Murdoch goes on to say:
Putting spirituality first and God second, somewhat as the Buddha put the Dharma above the gods. That is, on our account, the religious imperative that commands us to become free spirit is perceived as autonomously authoritative principle which has to be freely and autonomously adopted and self-imposed. We choose to be religious because it is better so to be. We must strive with all our might to become spirit, and what God is appears in the striving to answer this call. God is, quite simply, what the religious requirement comes to mean to us we respond to it. A religion is a cluster of spiritual values (Pg. 453).

It may be noted that for contemporary mankind, generalization cannot lead to an apprehension of a Christ-centered universe; but rather, it pointed to the vicious state of things. And yet one was
compelled to believe in divine transcendence. Thus, Murdoch's Anne is finally ready to take on the journey towards self-realization: “Well, I shall follow after and carry my cross and my Christ with me” (HC 513). For Anne, before whom the world in all its luminous glory, hope, light and disciplined austerity lies bare and open, she no longer felt compelled to seek or search any further. Here are the last words of the novel:

The big flakes come into view, moving, weaving, crowding, descending slowly in a great hypnotic silence which seemed to separate itself from the sounds of the street below. Anne stopped and watched it. It reminded her of something, which perhaps she had seen in a picture or in a dream. It looked like the heavens spread out in glory, totally unrolled before the face of God, countless, limitless, eternally beautiful, the universe in majesty proclaiming the presence and the goodness of its
creator. Anne stood there for a while.

Then she began to walk through the snowy streets at random, feeling lightened of her burdens. Tomorrow she would be in America (NS,514).

The novel ends with Anne ‘homeless and free…’ however it ends on a positive note of beginning life again as the novel moves from November snowfall to November snowfall completing a cycle of one year.

Through *Nuns and Soldiers* and *Henry and Cato* Murdoch painstakingly attempted to unite the paradoxes of life and reality. She had also juxtaposed characters of good against those who struggled with delusions. Murdoch wrote not to sermonize to a disinterested or passive readers but her motive was to show them, how to perceive an obscure journey more objectively. Like a typical task master, Murdoch, in novel after novel persistently yet patiently took up the task of disciplining her characters through their struggles and confusions, albeit gently. Murdoch handled the entire visitation scene with tact, reverence and love, so much so it compels the reader to look towards Christ than...
'Christology.' Murdoch’s Christ was far different from the biblical Christ. Her Christ was reachable, humane and amiable unlike, the biblical Christ who was far, grave, sad and miserable. The huge cross meant suffering, anguish, humiliation, doomed to endless tears. Thus, what Murdoch did was to show a Christ where one could connect to. A grave Christ cannot awaken millions just by being crucified. Murdoch’s interpretation of Christ may not be shocking to liberal theologians today, for there have been major changes in understanding the Bible objectively. Yet it does influence indirectly to a large extent, especially when it is fictionalized. Nevertheless, Murdoch took the risk to incorporate the ‘spiritual into the temporal’ and created a realistic novel with flattering panache. Murdoch consciously used image and language in order to project a particular idea, although she was not sure of how her readers would react. In The Sovereignty of Good Murdoch elucidated her doubts thus:

It is frequently difficult in philosophy
to tell whether one is saying
something reasonably public and
objective, or whether one is merely
erecting a barrier, special to one’s
own temperament, against one's own personal fears. (It is always a significant question to ask about any philosopher: what is he afraid of?) Of course one is afraid that the attempt to be good may turn out to be meaningless, or at best something vague and not very important, or turn out to be as Nietzsche described it, or that the greatness of great art may be an ephemeral illusion... That a glance at the scene prompts despair is certainly the case. The difficulty indeed is to look at all... It is very difficult to concentrate attention upon suffering and sin, in others or in oneself, without falsifying the picture in some way while making it bearable (Pg. 72-73).

The central idea of Murdoch's work was that goodness might be rare but it was not extinct. And the Christ-Anne conversation
reminds one of the saying in the Bible that man is made in the image of God. That is to say man need not attempt to become God-like but can and must strive to be good. Murdoch’s endeavour as a writer was not to console but awaken the complacent mind. Thus Anne discovered that she must seek to know ‘the God beyond God,’ or as in Henry and Cato ‘to take leave of God for God’s sake.’

To conclude religion may have lost its impact but transcendent good and moral effort are ways to move towards self-realization. Anne has set out on a journey towards self-realization but this time in ‘the presence and goodness of its creator.’
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