

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
THE ARTIST, HIS CHURCH, AND SOCIETY: THEMES
IN THE NOVELS OF MORLEY CALLAGHAN

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ABSTRACT

The similarities between Morley Callaghan's beliefs about art and literature and his personal philosophy have not been previously acknowledged. This study explores the nature and extent of that relationship particularly as it is reflected in the novels of social criticism, works such as More Joy in Heaven, The Loved and the Lost, and The Many Colored Coat, and in those which typify his treatment of the Church, Such is My Beloved and A Passion in Rome.

Caught as a writer between the exigencies of an authoritarian Church and what he regards as an environment hostile to artistic endeavour, Callaghan clearly feels compelled to defend the legitimacy of individual insight and the importance and integrity of art. Thus, he develops a concept of art as a moral activity and of the artist as the guardian of man's spiritual values in an increasingly materialistic age. Making a significant connection between the uniqueness of vision of the serious artist and the personal integrity of the moral man, Callaghan seems to suggest that it is imaginative approaches that are redeeming no matter what the special sphere of activity. Artistic talent or appreciation ^{is} are made the measure of moral insight and awareness; philistinism is regularly eschewed; and looking at the world out of one's own eyes tends to become the

acme of moral achievement.

Thus, in the novels of social criticism, Callaghan attacks his society for its materialism, conformity, and cant. Puritanism, too, is regretted for the special reasons of the artist. Not only are drama, gaiety, and passion woefully missing from the lives of characters who are preeminently sober, respectable, and sedate, but the ethics of hard work and repressed sexuality are seen to militate against art. Strong feelings of artistic alienation creep inevitably into the work. Indeed, there are signs that Callaghan's analysis derives more at times from a sense of isolation than from purely intellectual differences with the national ethos.

The pattern is repeated in Callaghan's treatment of the Church. In works such as A Passion in Rome and Such is My Beloved, for example, the author's habit of associating artistic talent or appreciation with superior insight, as well as the host of ineffectual priest figures that haunt his pages, assumes major thematic importance. Not only is a preference for imaginative, as opposed to doctrinal, approaches reflected in the triumph of Artist over Priest, but efforts are made to combat Christian concepts of innocence and the fatal fall to knowledge with complementary myth, with a kind of redemptive quest for awareness and the approach of the Artist to God.

There are important differences with the Church. Callaghan quarrels with major tenets of the faith, with

hierarchical conceptions of human love, and the other-worldly emphasis of orthodox belief, and he tends, therefore, to put traditional symbol and religious architecture to literary as opposed to devotional use. His use, for example, of parallels with the life of Christ typically reflects ironic distance as much as their source; the Bible itself fades into literature and myth.

There are several contradictions in the work, all partially explicable in terms of style. Even the author's literary shortcomings can be interpreted as a response to fears of being misunderstood. Thus, while it is not claimed that Callaghan's position is unique, and it would be unwise to overestimate his distance from the Church, it would seem that aesthetic considerations play an important role in his thought. His social criticism has been strongly influenced, as has his treatment of the Church, by his aims and aspirations as a writer and by his faith in the spiritual significance of art.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a passage of his memoirs written in 1963, Morley Callaghan recalls his contempt as a young man for "authority" and virtually all the existing orders of his day:

Why did I dislike so much contemporary writing? . . . I remember deciding that the root of the trouble . . . was that poets and storywriters used language to evade, to skip away from the object, because they could never bear to face the thing freshly and see it freshly for what it was in itself. A kind of doubletalk; one thing always seen in terms of another thing. Criticism? A dreary metaphor. The whole academic method! . . . I'd be damned if the glory of literature was in the metaphor. Besides, it was not a time for the decorative Renaissance flight into simile. Tell the truth cleanly. Weren't the consequences of fraudulent pretending plain to anyone who would look around? Hadn't the great slogans of the first World War become ridiculous to me before I had left high school? Wilsonian idealism! Always the flight of fancy. And Prohibition. Another fantasy. It was hilarious, a beautiful example of the all-prevailing fraudulent morality; and at college it had become a social obligation to go to the bootlegger's, and a man came to have a sneaking respect for those who openly broke the law—not for the policeman standing on the corner.

And the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas which I got in my college classroom? All the big words, the metaphysics, were to be treated with grudging suspicion. Nothing could be taken for granted. Nothing could be taken on authority. A craving for authority had led to Prohibition and stupid censorship in Boston.

Orthodoxy was for fat comfortable inert people who agreed to pretend, agreed to accept the general fraud, the escape into metaphor.¹

The passage is remarkable for several reasons, not least for its preoccupation with "words." Thoroughly typical of the moralist, it equates lifestyle and philosophical outlook with the manner of an age's literary expression and reflects not only the author's profound sense of disillusionment but also the great claims he consistently makes for art.

"Metaphor" is regarded as "a kind of doubletalk"; "the whole academic method" is dismissed; and both political "slogans" and "metaphysics" are regarded with "grudging suspicion." Honesty, on the other hand, is equated with simplicity of expression no matter what the special sphere of activity. Authentic insight and integrity become as much a matter of manner as of content, and art, seen always as a good indication, assumes a special responsibility to define and improve the spiritual state of the age, concerned as it is, professionally, with the quality of communication and with style.

As a statement of principle and belief the passage is a key one and reflects the bias of Callaghan's thought. The habit of viewing problems through the prism of aesthetic belief is a distinguishing feature of his work, as is his penchant for moving quickly, apparently without thought of distinctions, from questions of a more purely literary nature, such as style, to matters of a religious,

social, or political import. In truth, the source of Callaghan's views on most problems is his beliefs about literature and art, and his aims and aspirations as a writer continue strongly to influence his views.

The passage points as well to two important themes in Callaghan's novels, his criticism of Canadian society and his fascination with the Church. While the former is more apparent in his later novels and dates specifically from the Second World War, the latter is a feature of almost all the novels and seems to be the goal toward which the whole work has been moving. Apart from the fact that the Church is a ubiquitous image in the work, and the titles of two of the novels, They Shall Inherit the Earth and More Joy in Heaven, point specifically to Biblical inspiration, a variety of priests or priest figures haunt his pages, and one novel, in particular, Such is My Beloved, is devoted to a full-length study of the character of a priest. Certainly one is not surprised to find that the title of Callaghan's latest novel is A Passion in Rome, with all the various overtones of "passion."

Neither theme has been adequately explored. Content too often simply to assert that Callaghan is a Roman Catholic novelist, most criticism simply ignores the seriousness of his quarrel with the Church, and to date there has been no attempt to assess the nature of his views about society. In truth, both themes spring from a single source,

the author's profound sense of vocation, and resemble each other in several ways. It is important to note the similarities. In the first place they help us to judge more accurately his distance from the Church, and in the second they inform, and largely determine, the nature of his views about society. Caught between the exigencies of an authoritarian Church and what he regards as an environment hostile to artistic endeavour, Callaghan clearly feels compelled to defend the legitimacy of individual insight and to champion the importance and integrity of art. Thus, he self-consciously defines his vision in opposition to the orthodoxies of Mother Church and routinely castigates his society for its materialism, conformity and cant. In the event, the Church proves the more formidable opponent and occasions his most strenuous efforts. Artist and Priest engage in what proves to be an epic struggle on his pages, and moral authority is the prize. But his strictures against society are equally rooted in art. Philistinism is regularly eschewed, and the touchstones are virtually the same as those of his reactions to the Church: artistic talent or appreciation is invariably seen as the sign of the spirit; the aesthetic sensibility is esteemed; and the artist is the most aware of men.

Certainly Callaghan regards art as a moral activity, one that has largely been ignored, and he develops a concept of the artist as the guardian of man's spiritual values in

an increasingly materialistic age. He argues that

never in history has it been so important for the artist to say something about human life as it is right now with the great boom in technology we are about to have, and the emphasis on a scientific education.²

Further, he urges the writer to remember his "special function":

His job is to be concerned with the spirit and heart of man in these times when the general consensus of opinion seems to be that man has very little spirit at all.³

Elsewhere he defends the legitimacy of art:

as the philosophers themselves are aware, the artist [sic] kind of knowing, call it intuition if you will, could yield a different kind of knowledge beyond rational speculation.⁴

And he argues that art, ideally, teaches men how to live.

The hero of The Varsity Story claims, for example, that he "learned something about life from every line of poetry [he] committed to memory,"⁵ while Callaghan himself maintains that "the art of fiction is the greatest of all the arts, because the writer has for his material the ways of men and women in their relationship to each other."⁶

He insists everywhere upon the high seriousness of art. Convinced that "all great writers are really moralists" since "as soon as you begin to give a shape and form to human experience" you make a moral judgment,⁷ he defines serious writers as those who are trying "grimly to see the world with their own eyes"⁸ and even criticizes writers like Dickens for levity and looseness of structure.

Preferring himself works which "have an impact as a whole" and "offer some one vision of life, giving the whole thing its own reality," Callaghan dismisses Dickens' novels (along with those of Richardson, Smollett, and Scott) as "entertainment, a loosely-knit variety show."⁹

It is also relatively simple to establish Callaghan's sense of critical independence. He himself frequently announces it, and it manifests itself in a variety of ways. He explains, for example, his youthful determination to look at the world freshly for himself and makes perfectly clear, as was noted earlier, his contempt for authority and virtually all the existing orders of his day. Indeed, he maintains that a sense of alienation is absolutely crucial to a writer:

A real writer, that very rare thing—a man who looks at the world out of his own eyes and judges of it according to the best part of himself, whatever truth he has in him; his loyalty is all to this humanity in himself. This loyalty can't be a deliberate thing, a self-conscious thing. It is simply his way of seeing things. If such a man has any wisdom, any philosophy, it is imbued in him, it is never consulted, never dwelt on. There is a kind of miracle going on in him he knows nothing about; his heart and his mind are the one thing and his eye the window for this thing. So he always has his own authentic touch which can't possibly be like the touch of other men. If he tried [sic] to see things as others see them he becomes a liar and a hack, and above all he betrays himself. Thinking in this way, it seemed to me that all great writers by their₁₀ very nature must be heretical

It is clear that he prides himself on his own. Tom Lane, a character in The Varsity Story and a surrogate for Callaghan himself, admits proudly to "a flair for rebellion," and is said to have "pitted himself against all the prevailing opinions" (p. 94). Described as someone who is "really alien" in spirit, Tom turns down an opportunity to study in Britain (just as Callaghan had done)¹¹ explaining that

All a writer has, if he is any good . . .
 is his own eyes and his own ears
 Maybe I'm afraid of being seduced by the
 grandeurs and the beauties of Oxford. . . .
 I see things the way I do because I grew up
 around here. It's all I have, but it's
 mine. If I keep it I'll at least be try-
 ing to look at the world in my own way.
 (pp. 114-15)

Again, it is obvious that Callaghan feels unappreciated and that his work has been "stupidly read."¹² He accuses Canadian critics of not being "very bright,"¹³ complains loudly that no one has tried to "tackle [his] work and really say anything about it,"¹⁴ and clearly feels himself to be in the midst of a cultural environment that is indifferent if not hostile to art. Articles written by him as early as 1938 complain bitterly about "The Plight of Canadian Fiction,"¹⁵ and in a recent interview he suggests:

this country has some kind of ingrown hatred of excellence. The way to being ignored in this country is to seek and crave and love excellence. People in this country shy away from excellence.

They say, aw gee, no—and they go for the second rate thing, all the time.¹⁶

As Callaghan explains it:

I've always tried to fend for myself, you know, and it's had ups and downs, but I've always felt that if I didn't look after myself, no one else would. I never had scholarships. I never went to the Canada Council asking for a handout, never had one. Later on, the Canada Council gave me the Canada Council Medal and the Molson Prize, but these are awards, not grants. Being the kind of writer I was, in Canada, was a quixotic gesture, anyway, because the kind of stories that I wrote from the beginning were stories that couldn't possibly be printed in Canada. Where were they going to be printed? What magazine would print them? None. So they had to be printed outside the country. I saw that right from the beginning and that was fine; I just went on doing the kind of thing I did best. Then, in my off periods, when I got sort of weary of the whole thing, I just had to pick up a living as best I could.¹⁷

In a similar vein, he insists in a review of Solzhenitsyn that:

To the state and the politicians [in Canada] the writer is simply not important. This is a great thing for the writer who can do his work as he wishes to do it, but many a writer in Canada has wondered if it matters at all where he is.¹⁸

And he cannot resist comparing life under a capitalist system to that under a communist regime:

the human spirit suffers the same torments in both the capitalistic and communist worlds. [Solzhenitsyn] celebrates a man's right to his own inner life. He shows it is there for every man in every country, no matter how high the prison wall or the discipline of the iron conventions.¹⁹

More difficult to prove but worth recording is the influence of all of this upon his thought. There are signs that both his aims as an artist and his sense of isolation play an unusually large role in his work, and it is interesting to compare the similarities. He develops in the novels, for example, a concept of human character and personality that obviously owes much to art. Favouring intuitive approaches, he encourages imaginative understanding like his own.

The emphasis in the work upon complexity is itself an argument for awareness, a point Callaghan's characters make several times. Heroes like Peggy Sanderson and Michael Aikenhead admit, for example, to the superiority of instinct to reason. Peggy trusts only her "whirling-away feeling,"²⁰ and Michael bows his head to his heart.²¹ Others like Harry Lane relinquish their search for justice in favour of an ideal of sensitivity and "awareness" instead.²²

Elsewhere there are attempts in the novels to equate human experiences with art. Michael Aikenhead's affair with Anna Prychoda is said to participate in the pure realm of poetry, and human relationships are seen in terms of art. Peggy Sanderson's encounter with alien otherness in the naked body of the Negro boy, Jock, clearly has literary antecedents. With its attendant sensations of "beauty," pain, wonder, and strangeness (The Loved and the Lost, pp. 40-41), it participates in the Wordsworthian tradition of Romantic experience. Even Italian women are praised in

passing for turning lovemaking into an art in A Passion in Rome.²³

Callaghan also defends the mystery and integrity of the human personality against attempts to define it too narrowly. He lovingly explores, for example, the relationship between sinner and saint and in novels such as Such is My Beloved and More Joy in Heaven rejects religious concepts of innocence and guilt. Elsewhere he insists upon the ambiguity of human motivation and resists behaviourist explanations of human activity. Many constructions are put upon Harry Lane's conduct in The Many Colored Coat, and Callaghan insists that all of them are true. Indeed, the emphasis in all of the novels is upon increased understanding and imaginative approaches like his own.

Perhaps the clearest example of this kind of emphasis is to be found in Luke Baldwin's Vow. On one level at least, the novel is about the opposition between "a good practical view of things" and "the splendor and insight of the imagination,"²⁴ and it is clear that Callaghan favours the latter. Uncle Henry's point of view and its shortcomings are epitomized by his reading tastes. He prefers biographies and heaps scorn upon the fairytales favoured by Luke, what he refers to as "silly sentimental legends and myths" (p. 28). It is Mr. Kemp who gives the boy good advice. Advising Luke "to think [his] own thoughts" and "rely on [his] own experience" (p. 75), Mr. Kemp points out:

Some people never look to the right or the left and only see what's under their noses. Life has no mysteries for them. They're sure of everything. Maybe it's wise not to be too sure about a dog or a man and the spirit that gets into them. . . . You'll have to use your own eyes and your own imagination. (p. 76)

Not surprisingly, a great many correspondences exist between Callaghan's view of life as an artist and those of his ideal characters. His youthful determination, for example, to look at the world freshly for himself is a refrain running throughout his work and is everywhere a measure of integrity. In an article on the art of fiction he distinguishes between "two kinds of writers: the one who tries to see the world out of his own eyes and the other one, the commercial writer, who tries to see the world out of the eyes of others";²⁵ he equates "the very identity of the writer" with "his kind of eye";²⁶ and he laments with Tom Lane the fact that for the most part "scholars" have "been trained to see the world through somebody else's eyes" (The Varsity Story, p. 93). Thus, he applauds characters like Peggy Sanderson who adopt moral postures similar to his own:

She relied only on her own insights. She would take nothing for granted. It was wonderful and exasperating. . . . One was compelled to look at everything freshly.
(The Loved and the Lost, p. 174)

Callaghan himself appears to have noticed the similarity and wishes that others would as well. He confesses that keeping his independence is "terribly important

to [him] as a writer" and goes on to explain:

I suppose I do have this really peculiar moral view of the world, absolutely my own. In some ways it's quite an anarchistic view of the world. . . . anarchistic in the sense that it is fiercely dependent upon the individual view never yielding to another man's sense of rectitude. No character in my books, if you've ever noticed, ever rushes and throws himself at the feet of another man and says, Mea culpa, admit me back into the ranks. No! He may duck his chin a little, as has been said, and turn his coat collar up and his head down and go out walking alone against the wind. But he never comes back, and says, look, I did wrong, forgive me and let me back into the warmth of your house. Never. Nobody does that, ever, not one of them. No one has ever noticed this. If the guy is an outlaw, if this is the way he sees it, he goes on. He may have transformations within himself, discoveries about himself, he may get beaten or be in despair, with himself, but he doesn't go back and say I had it all wrong, you know, forgive me. Nothing like that. It's just unyielding; all those guys are unyielding.²⁷

Interestingly enough, the portrait he paints of the artist corresponds closely to his favourite kind of hero. Explaining with his hero, Arthur Tyndall, that a "man with the artistic temperament" is "always self-consciously observing and wondering, always separated" from the world (The Varsity Story, p. 117), Callaghan develops in the novels characters that are similarly alert, open-minded, and aware. Indeed, all his heroes are introspective souls, much given to meditation, and his novels are noticeably deficient in narrative adventure. Just as Callaghan himself "keeps looking at the appearance of things, call it concrete reality, the stuff of experience, or simply 'what

is out there',"²⁸ his heroes are described as either "on the watch" like Sam Raymond "for anything that would give [them] back their bearings" (A Passion in Rome, p. 7), or sensitive souls like Michael Aikenhead who describe a return to the enviable state of nature chiefly in terms of heightened perceptions:

My mind would grow quick from watching,
my eyes would be like hawk's eyes.
(They shall Inherit the Earth, p. 188)

Even his advice to his wife, Loretto, has close parallels in the novels. As a young man in Paris just embarking upon his literary career, he is convinced that

Our job . . . was to be concerned with living and it seemed to me it would be most agreeable to God if we tried to realize all our possibilities here on earth, and hope we would always be so interested, so willing to lose ourselves in the fullness of living, and so hopeful that we would never ask why we were on this earth.²⁹

He later develops in Anna Prychoda, the fictional embodiment of his ideal:

She went on from day to day, living and loving and exposing the fulness and wholeness of herself to the life around her. . . . she gave herself to everything that touched her, she let herself be, she lost herself in the fulness of the world, and in losing herself she found the world, and she possessed her own soul. People like her could have everything. They could inherit the earth.

(They Shall Inherit the Earth, p. 242)

Of course such a philosophy of "personalism" itself owes much to art.³⁰ For the most part devoting itself to a careful prescription for the best way to be "alive as a man

in the world,"³¹ Callaghan's personalism involves at once a rejection of ideology and the advancement of individualized ethical systems that are usually close to the author's own. Moral principle is construed out of a personal antipathy to authority, and the only way to arrive at reality is independently and intuitively.

Michael Aikenhead's case is instructive here. The hero of They Shall Inherit the Earth, Michael makes a similar survey of intellectual fashions as did Callaghan as a young man and arrives at virtually the same conclusions:

He began to think of all those he knew in the city who were in some way like him, because their souls were restless and there was a break within them. He could see Nathaniel Benjamin, the Christian convert . . . Huck Farr . . . [who] had found the brotherhood of man in the desire for women. . . . Bill Johnson, the revolutionary. . . . young Dave Choate . . . they were all like himself, only some of them became Catholics and some became communists, and then it was too bad for Catholicism and too bad for communism, for such people as these in this generation only heaped the chaos in their own souls on whatever they touched. Such people were all like him in this, that they couldn't know peace or dignity or unity with anything till they were single and whole within themselves.

(They Shall Inherit the Earth, pp. 241-42)

The emphasis in the work upon personal priorities also derives from personal experience. Moreover, it can be seen as an attempt to elevate what Callaghan regards as the novelist's natural preoccupation with "the ways of men and women in their relationship to each other" into a philosophy of life.³² Callaghan admits, for example, that:

Just as it was part of my writing creed to distrust calculated charm in prose, so as a person, I suppose I felt it was beneath me to try to ingratiate myself with anyone who aroused my curiosity.³³

And it is not far from there to the assertion that it is "little things" and not "great principles" that actually govern people's lives:

Whenever I would think of these two men who had been my friends [Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald], I would find myself growing fascinated at the way little details, little vanities, little slights, shape all our relationships. It is these little things, not clashes over great principles, that turn people against each other.³⁴

Finally, the impulse in the work towards reconciliation can be related to his writing creed. In a passage in his memoirs explaining his preference for the paintings of Matisse, Callaghan admires, in particular, the artist's attempt to present "the thing seen freshly in a pattern that was a gay celebration of things as they were."³⁵ He wonders:

Why couldn't all people have the eyes and the heart that would give them this happy acceptance of reality? The word made flesh. The terrible vanity of the artist who wanted the word without the flesh. I can see now that I was busily rejecting even then that arrogance of the spirit, that fantasy running through modern letters and thought that man was alien in this universe. From Pascal to Henry Miller they are the children of St. Paul.³⁶

Clearly related to his attempts as an artist to find "the right relationship between the words and the thing or person being described,"³⁷ the remarks have relevance for his characters' lives as well. The attempt as a writer to

strip the language, and make the style, the method, all the psychological ramifications, the ambience of the relationships, all the one thing, so the reader couldn't make separations³⁸

is equated with the adoption of a more appropriate attitude towards life, and certainly the kinds of accommodation he forces upon them are exactly those he favours himself. Annie Laurie's "fatalistic acceptance," for example, gives her "an unspoiled glow" and she is made to express the belief that:

All the trouble comes from people who are bent on using their heads. They look for angels in people, they always expect people to be better than they are Not me. . . . So I don't get outraged, see?
(The Many Colored Coat, p. 244)

Again, the kind of acceptance managed by Anna Prychoda makes her "innocently joyful," "proud and free" (They Shall Inherit the Earth, p. 152), and Michael is made to acknowledge as much as he can of life and death:

He was simply trying to get used to the notion of Anny dying, of Anna dead. . . . and he longed to be able to pray. . . . he spoke each word with a dreadful slow hesitancy, as if he must test every word to see if he honestly believed it and appreciated its full meaning. "Our Father, Who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, yes, yes, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," and he nodded his head slowly to that too. . . . When it was done, he felt he had accepted whatever there had been of life, and what there was to be of death.
(They Shall Inherit the Earth, p. 236)

The point that must be stressed above all others, then, is that Callaghan's aspirations as an artist are more than merely tangential to his thought. It is not surprising, therefore, that the special interests defined above

continue to colour his views. His thoughts about society are strongly influenced by these special interests as is his attitude toward the Church. What is surprising, and unacknowledged, is the extent to which this is so. The chapters which follow explore in detail the relation between Callaghan's ethics or beliefs and his aesthetic theories, and attempt to establish not only the substance but also the aesthetic character of his views.

Chapter Two examines Callaghan's treatment of the Church. The author's habit of associating artistic talent or appreciation with superior insight and the host of ineffectual priest figures that haunt his pages assume major thematic importance here. A comparison of the personal fortunes and careers of two of his characters, the artist, Sam Raymond, in A Passion in Rome, and the priest, Fr. Dowling, in Such is My Beloved, points to the superiority of imaginative approaches to truth. There are serious differences with the Church. Tending to replace obedience, orthodoxy, and faith with the simple virtue of looking at the world through one's own eyes, Callaghan quarrels with, among other things, hierarchical conceptions of human love, the other-worldly emphasis of traditional belief, and the puritan tradition of Mother Church.

Chapter Three explores his views about society. Making a significant connection in his work between "spiritual dryness" and "tiredness of the imagination,"³⁹ Callaghan seems to suggest in novels such as More Joy in

Heaven, The Loved and the Lost, and The Many Colored Coat, that it is businessmen who do not read who are bound to be morally unaware. He attacks his society for its materialism, conformity, and dullness, and there are signs that his analysis derives more at times from strong feelings of artistic isolation than from purely intellectual differences with the national ethos.

There are several contradictions in the work. Disputing doctrinal approaches, Callaghan attempts complementary myth himself, and Christian concepts of innocence and the fatal fall to knowledge are replaced with a kind of redemptive quest for awareness and the approach of the Artist to God. Callaghan's use of religious metaphor is also contradictory. Resisting the flight into metaphor on the one hand, he approaches the Bible as literature on the other, and is not above putting both traditional symbol and church architecture to ironic, if not devotional, use. Chapter Four addresses itself, in particular, to the gap between theory and practice in the novels and attempts by way of conclusion to assess the nature of Callaghan's achievement.

CHAPTER II

CALLAGHAN AND THE CHURCH: THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE AND A THEOLOGY OF IMAGINATION

A constant element in Callaghan's work, and one which illustrates in a particularly striking fashion the aesthetic basis of his moral philosophy, is the author's quarrel with the Church. I refer here, of course, to the Roman Catholic Church in particular—Callaghan was raised in that tradition—but his criticism applies as well to the whole of Western Christianity, what he refers to in A Passion in Rome as "the world that shaped [our] lives" (p. 170). His debt to Christianity has been generally overestimated, and his distance from that tradition never fully explored.¹ For the most part Callaghan's confidence in art replaces his faith in orthodox dogma or creed, and wherever traditional belief survives it has undergone significant change. The Artist usurps the Priest as the natural guardian of man's morals and his spiritual health; he approaches God as Divine Seer into truth; and as the Bible fades more and more into myth and literature, an artist ultimately becomes the hero of one of the novels.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Part one establishes the triumph of Artist over Priest and suggests some of the reasons for the apparent superiority of

intuitive approaches to truth; part two examines in specific detail the nature of Callaghan's quarrel with the Church; while part three analyzes what amounts to a kind of theology of the imagination with particular reference to Callaghan's use of religious metaphor and his reinterpretation of Holy Writ.

I The Triumph of Artist over Priest

Whether or not Callaghan's quarrel with Christianity arises out of his youthful determination as an artist to look at the world freshly for himself, it is clear that he plumps for individual insight and imagination in preference to doctrinal approaches to truth. He tends, therefore, to equate superior insight with artistic appreciation or talent and to delegate to the Artist the moral grandeur and the sympathy more commonly reserved for the Priest.

Two relatively minor leitmotifs in his early work, the host of ineffectual priest figures haunting the novels and his habit of associating artistic talent with insight and imagination, ultimately achieve major thematic importance. The portrait of Father Dowling in Such is My Beloved represents the culmination of his interest in the Priest; the study of painter cum photographer, Sam Raymond, in A Passion in Rome constitutes an apotheosis of the Artist as hero; and a comparison of the two novels is very

revealing indeed. Analysis of the lives and objective circumstances of the heroes demonstrates the superiority of intuitive approaches to Truth; comparison of their responses to particular masterpieces (of art and of literature) clarifies the aesthetic nature of the quarrel with the Church; while strong biographical parallels between the Artist as hero and Callaghan himself, lend weight to the argument that the author's sympathy is reserved for the Artist as opposed to the Priest.

The use of artistic talent or appreciation as the sign of superior insight and imagination occurs so frequently in Callaghan's novels that it amounts to a kind of literary shorthand. From Jim Hughes' singing in It's Never Over, to Arthur Tyndall's fluteplaying in The Varsity Story, and Jim McAlpine's penchant in The Loved and the Lost for pencil portraiture of his friends, short stories and novels alike routinely associate aesthetic ability with the quality of the heroes' moral concerns. Callaghan himself explains the symbol. Speaking of his short story entitled "Timothy Harshaw's Flute," he remarks:

The flute seems to me a symbol. The guy who plays the flute strikes a blow against the world. It has something to do with the lightness and airiness of the human spirit.²

In addition to the plastic arts and music, the reading tastes of the characters are often an indication, frequently ironic, of the state of their spiritual health.

In Strange Fugitive, Trotter Sr.'s sacrifice of his Sunday painting to the ethics of hard work and material success symbolizes the atrophy inherent in the Puritan imagination. His family life inevitably suffers and he dies an untimely death from gangrene of the leg. The reading matter enjoyed by Harry Trotter himself, and by Scotty Bowman in The Many Colored Coat, detective stories on the one hand, and business magazines on the other, reflects the dullness of their souls and their obsession with violence, sex, crime, and money, while Mrs. Gibbons' passion, in A Broken Journey, for books about the lives and self-mortification of the saints reveals at once the morbid perversity of her sexual preoccupations and her penchant for martyrdom and melodrama. Peter Gould's familiarity, in the same work, with the novels of D.H. Lawrence and his recommendation of them to his girlfriend, Marion, are ironic. He has not absorbed their message about the deleterious effects of over-rationalization upon the human passional life. And Wolgast's father's renunciation of reading after the white horse incident in The Loved and the Lost represents his spiritual capitulation to materialism, to the economics of power and pride of possession.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the ultimate hero of the novels is an artist like Callaghan himself. The hero of Callaghan's latest work, A Passion in Rome, is the painter cum photographer, Sam Raymond, and there are

remarkable similarities between Sam's life and Callaghan's own. Apart from the fact both men are artists, they struggle with a sense of failure and enjoy journalistic assignments in Rome.³ Moreover Sam's opinions are frequently identical to those expressed by Callaghan elsewhere.

Sam Raymond's eventual reconciliation to the failure of his personal and professional life—he has to admit he is a "no-love, no-talent guy" (A Passion in Rome, p. 345)—is virtually the same as Callaghan's own accommodation as he explains it in an article entitled "The Pleasures of Failure."⁴ Sam's decision to put personal priorities before career, what he refers to as "success of the heart" (p. 162), as well as his querulousness at his father's commercial appeal, echoes Callaghan's criticism of material success and his description of his wartime struggles with "spiritual dryness" and with "panic" after the failure of two of his plays.⁵ Claiming to have gradually gained strength from his struggle, Callaghan explains how he began "a new productive period in my career" circa 1946-47, feeling "strangely in full possession of myself, more than ever my own man."⁶ The parallel with Sam Raymond's conviction is very close:

If you're no good, and don't ever see it, well it means you haven't much awareness of anything. . . . It seems to me if you have this awareness, even if it takes a little anguish, you've lifted yourself . . . You don't quit. You try something else.

(A Passion in Rome, p. 172)

There are also strong similarities between Callaghan's opinions in That Summer in Paris and those expressed in the novel. Indeed, the young manhood of the author appears to be the model for the experience of the other. Thus Sam describes the confusion caused in his youth by "all the doctrinal ideologies . . . fading into myth," as well as his contempt for speculation about "things that could not be known" (A Passion in Rome, p. 334), in words which echo Callaghan's rejection in his autobiography of political "slogans" and "metaphysics."⁷ Moreover, the hero of the novel admires the relaxed acceptance by Mediterranean Catholics of the facts of death and genital love. Sam and Wally Koster "[talk] about religion and [agree] that if it had been possible for either one of them to have a formal faith in these times, they would choose to be Mediterranean Catholics" (A Passion in Rome, p. 336), remarks which echo the author's observations about Ernest Hemingway in That Summer in Paris:

I heard someone at a party say mockingly, 'Hemingway became a Catholic because all the Spanish bullfighters were Catholic.' No. There was much more to it than that. . . . it struck me that by some twist of temperament, in spite of his puritan family, he was in fact intended to be a Mediterranean Catholic.⁸

Sam's decision to return to America, to father, family, career, and responsibility, also parallels Callaghan's life. Callaghan renounced the expatriate life of the artist-exile after one short summer in Paris in

order "to forge [his] own vision in secret spiritual isolation in [his] native city," Toronto.⁹

Although writing out of personal experience is not unusual, the implications are significant here. In view of Sam's denial of the Christian vision, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that his opinions are close to Callaghan's own. He dismisses Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" as an "old, old lie" (A Passion in Rome, p. 46) and insists that his opinions are as valid as anyone else's:

Those distorted figures in "The Last Judgment." No, it was only Michelangelo's best judgment of the matter. Never the last one.

(p. 352)

Such explicitness is useful, moreover, in clarifying the bias of Callaghan's thought. It illuminates the ironies of works such as Such is My Beloved and confirms the triumph of Artist over Priest.

The priestly tradition in Callaghan's novels is almost wholly one of impotence and ineffectuality. His short stories and novels are veritably priest-ridden, and from the anonymous cleric admired by Vera Trotter in Strange Fugitive, through the besotted Father Mason in It's Never Over, to the painfully inexperienced Father Vincent Sullivan in A Broken Journey,¹⁰ the prototype for Father Dowling himself, priests and the exigencies of their profession hold a special fascination for the author. Doubtless some of the characters are drawn from life. The

priest, for example, with whom he enjoys long conversations in his autobiography, appears to be the model for at least three of them, Father Mason, Father Dowling, and Father Butler.¹¹ He explains his interest with irony: it seems to one of his elderly priests in Such is My Beloved, for example, that "the young priest was just as pleasing to God as the Blessed Virgin."¹²

Even after the apotheosis of the character, in Such is My Beloved, they continue to haunt the novels. It is Fr. Butler in More Joy in Heaven who effects Kip Caley's change of heart, just as Peggy Sanderson's father's betrayal of his convictions clearly influences her life. A Methodist minister in The Loved and the Lost, Peggy's father surrenders ignominiously to the racial prejudice of his flock. Again, it is a priest who hears Harry Lane's confessions in The Many Colored Coat, while a lapsed seminarian, Tomaso Ferraro, appears as a journalist in A Passion in Rome.

Despite professions of faith, solemn vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, and his mission to carry Christ's message to the world, the priest's tradition in Callaghan's novels is not a happy one, and his vanities and foibles are constantly exposed. While always a presence to be reckoned with (Strange Fugitive), and giving genuine comfort at times (Fr. Butler), they are generally portrayed as ineffectual (Fr. Vincent Sullivan) and deeply troubled themselves (Fr. Mason), whose irrelevant advice to the

heroes, such characters mostly manage very well without. It is their preoccupation with sex as the root of all evil that invalidates their moral advice for John Hughes, Michael Aikenhead, and Harry Lane in turn, while Sam Raymond simply falls asleep in the confessional box, unable even to pay attention to what the priests with their strange rituals were saying.

The unfortunate plight of Fr. Dowling in Such is My Beloved represents Callaghan's definitive study of the cleric,¹³ and it is revealing to compare the priest's failure with the success of Sam Raymond in A Passion in Rome. While what is implicit in one is explicit in the other, both novels constitute harsh criticism of Christianity, and a comparison of the two clarifies the aesthetic nature of Callaghan's quarrel with the Church. Callaghan admittedly deals here in generalizations, particularly in A Passion in Rome where he is perfectly content to equate Michelangelo's vision with the whole of Western Christianity. He assembles an international cast, and characters as various as the Roman Catholic, Francesca, who is the estranged wife of an Englishman, Reggie Winters, an Italian film maker, Alberto, who is described as a Christian humanist, and an American Catholic, Anna Connel, all experience spiritual confusion, the legacy of, what is for Callaghan at least, the Christian vision in a non-specific sense.

In Such is My Beloved and A Passion in Rome

artistic and priestly traditions cohere. Aesthetic talent and appreciation are signs of superior insight even in Such is My Beloved. One has only to compare, for example, Fr. Anglin's self-righteous pomposity with the attractive moral earnestness of Fr. Dowling, a point made manifest in the novel by the contrast between the former's fears of contemporary literature and the latter's extensive personal library. But the wholesale failure of the holy father's spiritual commission continues as an ironic pattern as well. By all objective standards, Fr. Dowling's attempt to construct a new society based on Christian principles must be judged an unmitigated disaster: whereas Fr. Dowling's sacred mission to the world only removes him from life and reality to the insane asylum of theological disputation about the meaning and nature of love, Sam's busman's tour of Roman art treasures restores him safely to the real world of love and possibility he left behind him in North America. He returns home to father, responsibility, and the hope of a new career.

The key to the discrepancy, of course, is Fr. Dowling's submission to religious orthodoxy versus Sam's uncompromising critical independence. The courage of Sam's convictions, not suprisingly, is ascribed to his profession. As painter cum photographer, his temperament is seen to be quintessentially aesthetic. But the measure of the differences between the two is their reactions to specific works of art: to Solomon's "Song of Songs" in Fr. Dowling's case, and to

Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" in Sam's.

Both works are religious masterpieces whose beauty and genius are admired, but their respective visions, which are antithetical, are rejected for very different reasons. Whereas Fr. Dowling originally responded to "the bold sensual phrases" in praise of love (Such is My Beloved, p. 78), he grows increasingly disturbed by the sexuality he discerns at the heart of the poetry and eventually abandons his insight in favour of correct theological interpretation. Sam Raymond, on the other hand, relying solely upon his personal experience of life, confidently dismisses Michelangelo's "sorrowful" vision as a "lie" and an unfortunate distortion (A Passion in Rome, p. 46). Having seen for himself the innocent pleasure afforded by human love, he resists Christian fears of sensuality and trusts his intuition instead.

It is the question of freedom and of faithfulness to one's personal view of life that is ultimately at issue here. As the essence of moral seriousness and authenticity, Fr. Dowling's betrayal of his convictions is the worst of his several sins. Whereas it is suggested that Fr. Dowling is the prisoner of his faith and doctrinal beliefs, Sam's search for meaning is referred to by the hero as "an enlargement of his freedom" (A Passion in Rome, p. 127). References to tied hands and to the sacrifice of his manhood through his vows of celibacy (Such is My Beloved,

pp. 20, 50, 107, 112 and 129) reinforce this idea in Fr. Dowling's case—his hands are "big, soft [and] strong" (p. 112) but powerless—while Sam's flight from the perilous chapel is regarded by him as an escape from "a place where he had been imprisoned and tormented for years" (A Passion in Rome, p. 39).

The tendency to defer to authority is seen to have tremendous consequences upon Fr. Dowling's life. Confronted with experiences which do not square with orthodox dogma, he tends to accept official explanations of the truth. The differences between the religious temperament and the approach of the artist are particularly apparent at the beginnings of both novels. Whereas Fr. Dowling is completely convinced and as eager to minister as he is naive, Sam Raymond is possessed simply of a "fierce, fugitive longing" to see some "sublime rightness" to it all (A Passion in Rome, p. 334). He is world-weary and anxious only to see everything for himself. Ironically, it is Sam who saves Anna Connel and himself, while Fr. Dowling not only fails the prostitutes but also comes to grief on his own.

It is in their ability to come to terms with reality that the cause of Fr. Dowling's failure and Sam's success can be seen. Whereas Fr. Dowling belongs to an essentially closed and overtly idealistic system of belief, Sam Raymond, espousing no particular ideology or creed, maintains a moral posture identical to Callaghan's own. Thus, while the

priest's confrontation of sex, sin, and suffering embodied in the prostitutes, Midge and Ronnie, progressively disillusioned him, Sam's response to the complexity of human life, admirably open to reality as he is, gradually restores his self-confidence.

Sam's confrontations are associated with visual spectacle, with his visits to the Sistine Chapel, the Coliseum, and the Papal funeral in Rome, and in each case he faces an unpleasant reality. There is no attempt to soften the truth; he faces, for example, at the Papal funeral the horror of the "conqueror worm" (A Passion in Rome, p. 271). But he emerges with his convictions intact. Thus, although he is visibly shaken by his visit to the Coliseum where Anna Connel's ministrations to the starving cats causes him imaginatively to reconstruct the sufferings of the first Christian martyrs, he eventually arrives at the conclusion that "it's not guilt, it's the fear of life that has troubled the human race" (p. 194). Dramatic recreation, in effect, of the historical roots of Christianity, savage spectacles such as this only confirm him in his original suspicion: it is Christian pessimism that militates against life. Facing at the moment of their death not only the fact of human mortality, but also the beast within (the fact of man's inhumanity to man), early Christians, as conceived by Sam Raymond, were literally "frightened to death":

Tossed out, now just the cat's meat, the world's fear in the scream of agony of the first one; then another and another, torn and swallowed in fierce gulps. But now no more frantic lonely wails; those who were left—just scared to death; just hunks of meat.

(A Passion in Rome, p. 155)

Anna's problems are thus symptomatic of what he refers to elsewhere as "the world's sea of fear" (p. 143), and the "really scared people he had known were the ones without any good opinion of themselves" (p. 114).

In marked contrast, Fr. Dowling's reactions to anomaly are typically equivocal, and he frequently resorts to rationalization. Struck, for example, by the fact of his affection for Charlie Stewart who is patently a good man even though an atheist, he is fond of seeing him as a Catholic manqué: "Charlie's in the Church in heart and he doesn't really know it" (Such is My Beloved, p. 56); he wishes that Marx had been a Christian (p. 75); and he even entertains the absurd notion that Nietzsche's "lack of Catholicity is a disguise" (p. 75). The point seems to be that Fr. Dowling is incapable of facing the implications of his most daring speculations, and that, in fact, he is never very far from the institutionalized Church in this respect.

The results are equally revealing. Incapable of facing or accepting either his own or his Church's failure, Fr. Dowling ends in complete capitulation to authority,

monstrous egotism, and despair. His interview with Bishop Foley is his finest hour as far as critical independence is concerned. He regards him "as he would . . . an ordinary man, instead of simply seeing him as his superior, and accepting his words . . . as he would the word of God" (Such is My Beloved, p. 129). But it ends with his recollection that "Obedience is necessary. Obedience is to be preferred even to sacrifice" (p. 133). His madness appears to be the consequence of such obedience, as well as the result of self-sacrificial love, so that doctrinal approaches to truth are implicitly dismissed by Callaghan as pernicious and life-denying. On the other hand, Sam Raymond's recognition of the paradox inherent in defeat, that the human spirit is virtually unconquerable and that life goes inexorably on, leaves him spiritually renewed and "fiercely exultant," with a fresh set of priorities and hope (A Passion in Rome, p. 352). It is imaginative approaches that are redemptive, and which Callaghan evidently prefers.

Much art and some twenty-odd years separate the subtle ironies of Such is My Beloved (1934) from the more strident assertions of A Passion in Rome (1961). Although the priest's story is the more compelling of the two, conclusions favourable to the Artist are unavoidable in a philosophical sense. As biographical parallels are examined between the hero's life in A Passion in Rome and Callaghan's own, and as the author demonstrates that ideological

independence and simple faithfulness to one's personal experience ensure growth, triumph over adversity, and hope, the Artist is revealed as the most moral and aware of men. As such he usurps the Priest in his spiritual functions and role: Sam restores to life and to reality not only himself, but Anna Connel as well. Like so many of Callaghan's characters, Fr. Dowling is doomed to failure as a man simply because he is a priest, while Sam's success is virtually guaranteed because he is an artist like Callaghan himself.

II The Nature of the Quarrel

Despite the triumph of Artist over Priest, Callaghan's moral philosophy owes much to the Christian tradition, though the debt is not as great as has been claimed.¹⁴ While his belief in the transcendent power of love and concern for the spiritual life of the individual are derived from the Christian tradition, Callaghan means something very different from caritas by love and is, for the most part, resolutely critical of orthodox, doctrinal, and institutional forms of Christianity. Not enough attention has been paid to the author's own disclaimer: "The last thing that's in my mind is to write religious books."¹⁵

Many other of his comments put his position forthrightly enough. In spite of his Catholic childhood, Callaghan is suspicious of metaphysical speculation,¹⁶ as

impatient as his hero, Sam Raymond, with pretense about "things that could never be known" (A Passion in Rome, p. 334), and contemptuous of Catholic conversions.¹⁷ It is his rejection of "orthodoxy" and "authority" which is chiefly important here,¹⁸ for this, coupled with his inherent distrust of purely rational approaches to life, makes the claim of his supposed indebtedness to the French Roman Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, very unlikely indeed.¹⁹ He knew and admired the man, but not his moral philosophy.

External evidence in support of the influence is scant and the novels themselves do not support it. Callaghan alludes briefly to the "personalist" approach of Maritain in a review of Aldous Huxley²⁰ and witnesses to the personal appeal of the man in an article called "It was news in Paris—not in Toronto."²¹ But the article is more a piece of Canadian flagwaving than serious philosophical appreciation and finds him, at its end, wryly suspicious of intellectual conversion by sheer force of personality. In view of their friendship in the early 1930's, it has been assumed that the dedication of Such is My Beloved, "To those times with M. in the winter of 1933," refers to Jacques Maritain. But the fact goes unverified by Callaghan, and its confirmation would serve only to strengthen the irony of the novel's depiction of the decline and fall of a priest. Moreover, Callaghan explicitly denies such a debt, and in

a letter written in March, 1967 compares the idea of tracing such an influence to "barking up the wrong tree."²² It is just possible that Maritain's analysis of the inadequacies of "bourgeois individualism"²³ defined the author's arguments in They Shall Inherit the Earth, but the insights were his own prior to 1933 (as evidenced by works such as Strange Fugitive, It's Never Over, and A Broken Journey), and the novel contains, in addition, a damning caricature of a Catholic convert, in the person of Nathaniel Benjamin. While Callaghan would agree with the philosopher that changes in the social structure must be accompanied by profound changes within the individual heart, his own approach to that conversion is by way of neither blind faith nor doctrinal disputation. He admits only to an interest in the "neo-Thomism of Jacques Maritain"²⁴ and maintains that even the philosophers themselves would agree that "the artist [sic] kind of knowing" could yield "a different kind of knowledge beyond rational speculation."²⁵

There is evidence, moreover, to suggest that Callaghan has always been mildly skeptical about the relevance of formal philosophy to ordinary life. A short story written early in his career, for example, entitled "In His Own Country," details the progressive deterioration of the mind of a small town citizen, Bill Lawson, who gradually becomes obsessed with the idea of emulating St. Thomas Aquinas and producing "a great work like a summary of all

known fields of science, to demonstrate the relation between science and, offhand, religion."²⁶ While the attempt is ludicrous in itself, some, at least, of the irony rubs off on the studies. Again, in The Varsity Story (1948), one of Callaghan's characters, Tom Lane, a would-be novelist very much, one would suppose, like the young Callaghan, mocks the efforts of a philosophy student "at St. Mike's":

Maybe you'll end up knowing exactly what St. Thomas or St. Augustine thought about the world, and I won't know it as well. Maybe you'll master their thought. But if any simple-minded student ever asks you a question about history or literature you'll look surprised and say, 'It wasn't my subject.' You're a pair of specialists. I have nothing to use but my own head.
(p. 92)

The same novel gives us a portrait of an American graduate student "writing a thesis on Aesthetics, St. Augustine's idea of beauty," who is described as "tired, troubled and unhappy" (p. 156), and both the Medieval Institute and Maritain are also mentioned. Maritain's reputation is questioned: "Well, is he a philosopher or an apologist?" (p. 154). And, finally, in A Passion in Rome (1961), the lapsed seminarian, Tomaso Ferraro, exists as a kind of caution:

I spent years with [St.] Augustine's thought. Can you believe this? I had such a passion for understanding Augustine that I wanted to think and feel as he did, see the world out of his eyes. . . . Then it struck me one day. What is this? I am not St. Augustine. I am Tomaso. What a discovery! What a

revolt! The whole world out there to
look at out of my own eyes. So it was
done.

(p. 188)

The hard fact is, of course, that Callaghan often finds himself in violent disagreement with major tenets of the Christian faith. He is particularly distressed by Christian pessimism about human nature and theological conceptions about the nature of love and inveighs loudly against their survival in the works of Roman Catholic and secular writers alike.

He disagrees, for example, with the dualism he discerns at the heart of Western Christianity. Indeed, he identifies it, as we have seen, with "that fantasy running through modern letters and thought that man [is] alien in this universe" and regards writers as various as Pascal and Henry Miller to be equally heir to that tradition, all "the children of St. Paul."²⁷

He is particularly distressed by Christian fears of human sexuality and attacks an otherwise "beautiful writer like Mauriac [is]" evident "disgust with the flesh."²⁸ He feels positively "pagan" in comparison and even views the "correct copulations" of D.H. Lawrence as an Anglo-Saxon over-reaction.²⁹

Hierarchical conceptions of love are mocked in Such is My Beloved, and the entire Christian vision of life as sorrowful rejected in A Passion in Rome. Orthodox theological opinion which considers man's spiritual love for

his fellow man to be but a pale imitation of Divine caritas, and where sexual passion does not rate at all,³⁰ accords ill with Fr. Dowling's own experience in the first novel as evidenced by his reading of "The Song of Songs," while Sam Raymond contends in the second that "any fool could see" for himself that, far from being a miserable existence compounded of sex, sin and suffering wherein the only escape from "desire" was death, the human condition is frequently enjoyed by men and women, whose only sin, if any, is their obvious delight in sensual pleasure (A Passion in Rome, p. 46). Indeed, the only love possible in Callaghan's novels is the human sexual variety, what Sam Raymond describes as "a mixture of compassion and lust" nonetheless wonderful for that (A Passion in Rome, p. 63), which is demonstrably capable of at once redeeming and putting "the glow" (p. 84) back on human lives without the necessity of Divine intervention.

Callaghan is also critical of Christian conceptions of human nature as fallen and of Redemption only through Grace, regarding them as destructive of human dignity, responsibility, and free will. The idea of "original sin" does not appeal to him, nor to Strange Fugitive's hero, Harry Trotter;³¹ speculation about innate depravity "bores" and irritates Callaghan at once; and he regards Christianity's "awareness of evil" as "a hopeless spiritual trap."³² Even Fr. Dowling rejects "original sin" as explanation of the

prostitutes' "condition" (Such is My Beloved, p. 124).

Thus, while Callaghan admits that Graham Greene's acceptance of "man and his relationship with God as something revealed with finality within the Catholic Church" gave him "a whole dramatic apparatus" as a writer, he bemoans the "dank and dismal Catholicism that came out of it."³³ He confesses himself "completely bemused" by the reappearance of this "ancient view" of man in contemporary literature, in the works say of William Golding and Harold Pinter, since he regards conceptions of man as "naturally good, or naturally evil" as "old nonsense" himself and is genuinely puzzled at its appeal for the young.³⁴ Convinced himself that "A man's nature is a very tangled web, shot through with gleams of heavenly light, no doubt, and the darkness of what we call evil forces,"³⁵ Callaghan admires, instead, the work of Albert Camus, who arrived at the "conviction that man, just being what he was, had the possibilities for dignity and responsibility."³⁶

In truth, ^{the} whole burden of Callaghan's moral philosophy, with its emphasis upon the fullest self-realization possible and upon life as it is lived upon this earth, is often inimical to the other ^ridly and self-sacrificial Christian tradition of Redemption through Grace and out of Time. Regarding mortality as "a gloomy inevitable experience,"³⁷ Callaghan explains how he himself avoids morbid preoccupation with death (as well as futile speculation about the

meaning of life) by immersing himself as fully as possible in the day to day business of living in order to realize all his "potentialities" and "possibilities" as a man.³⁸ Both Ross Hillquist, interested only in "life on the earth" (p. 70), and Anna Prychoda, who "inherits the earth" (p. 242), as ideal characters in They Shall Inherit the Earth, achieve Callaghan's moral goal as it is indicated in the novel's title, while Fr. Dowling's sacrifice of his manhood, through his original vows of celibacy and his capitulation to religious authority, is clearly regarded as madness. Not only is chastity regarded as an impossible ideal of self-denial, but the concept of self-sacrificial spiritual love is considered a delusion and a monstrous form of egotism.

The Christian hope of salvation is also criticized in the novels. On the one hand regarded by characters like Michael Aikenhead as a temptation to futile "pity" (They Shall Inherit the Earth, pp. 88-89), and on the other considered unprofitable, attempts like Fr. Dowling's to preach "Christian resignation to a life of misery," Callaghan implies, are pernicious and life-denying (Such is My Beloved, p. 103). Far from relying upon the hope of Heaven, characters in the novels who achieve eternity do so in this life by surrendering to it utterly. Even Fr. Dowling acknowledges Midge's innocent abandonment of herself to the pleasure of the moment as a kind of intuitive understanding of Eternity, while Michael Aikenhead regards Anna's

selflessness before all the implications of life in the same light (They Shall Inherit the Earth, p. 242). As Fr. Dowling explains it, "That desire to make each moment precious, to make the immediate eternal, or rather to see the eternal in the immediate," is "really Christian in the best sense of the word" (Such is My Beloved, p. 46).

Doctrinal differences such as these make attempts to interpret Callaghan as a specifically Roman Catholic novelist open to question at least, and, indeed, such efforts eventually run into anomalies themselves. Malcolm Ross's introduction to Such is My Beloved, for example, while recognizing the irony of the work, argues that "Callaghan's assumptions are thoroughly Catholic," insists that "He never doubts the divine nature and mission of the Church," and then experiences difficulty before the fact of Fr. Dowling's madness:

Now this sacrifice of the mind, this offering up of the priest's sickness, is not a pleasant symbol. Does Callaghan mean by it a rejection of the intellectual life as irrelevant (or even dangerous) to salvation?³⁹

Ross thinks not and is forced to argue that the priest's sacrifice of "prideful self-sufficient intelligence at work in the vacuum of the abstract" restores love.⁴⁰ The truth of the novel is exactly the reverse. Fr. Dowling's self-sacrifice in the name of love is a capitulation to pride and to obedience and restores not love in the human sense,

which is all that Callaghan sees as either possible or necessary for man, but as presented in the novel, futile, and essentially mindless, theological "commentary on the Song of Songs" (Such is My Beloved, p. 144). The ironic implications are clear: instead of self and human sexuality in this life, Fr. Dowling should renounce the idea of sacrifice itself, idle speculation about the nature of Divine love, and the vain hope of redemption out of time.

Despite quarrels with authority and Christian doctrine, Callaghan retains affectionate respect for Mother Church. A variety of churches file across his pages as inescapable physical facts and spiritual signs of man's loftiest aspirations; priests do, upon occasion, tender perfectly good advice; and many of his characters draw strength and comfort still from their faith and from traditional ritual and dogma. There is, on the other hand, neither hesitation to expose imperfections, nor compunction to mute condemnation of the Church's palpable failures. Valuable respository and defender still of spiritual truth in a materialistic age, religious architecture unwittingly mocks the unfortunate legacy of sexual fear which has contributed to the dryness of soul and to the disaffection of contemporary man.

Such is My Beloved constitutes Callaghan's clearest exposé of the Church's limitations in terms of officers and institution. Father Dowling's fall and ultimate fate are

seen as an unfortunate waste of human potential; but while there is compassion in the treatment of Father Dowling, the novel is caustic in its portrayal of other clerics and unrelenting in its insistence upon the irrelevancy of many of the Church's functions. At best ineffectual before human suffering, at worst it seems to aggravate man's misery.

Despite boundless enthusiasm and eager anticipation of his spiritual mission to the world, Fr. Dowling's role is neither vital nor efficacious. Reduced for the most part to exhortation by means of sermon and to visitation of the sick, he merely presides over the ritual moments of life such as birth, marriage, and death, without either involvement or personal influence in the lives and suffering of his parishioners. It is the separation of sexual and spiritual matters, neatly symbolized in the impossible relationship of priest and prostitutes, that is chiefly the Church's undoing. Fr. Dowling's view of celibacy is ironically juxtaposed to religious injunctions against birth control. On the one hand, the Church emasculates its servant, since Fr. Dowling's only opportunity to save himself and others lies in the free exercise of his manhood and his human potential, while on the other it adds to the misery of its faithful adherents like the hapless Cinzano family. And the legacy of sexual frustration and confusion which such distinctions loose upon the world is apparent in many of the novels: characters such as Lillian Thompson in

It's Never Over, Marion Gibbons in A Broken Journey, the Morrises in The Many Colored Coat, and Francesca and Tomaso Ferraro in A Passion in Rome, all experience serious confusion.

The tendency of the Church to reflect rather than reform the society it serves, most apparent perhaps in the novels of social satire and criticism, is also held up to ridicule in Such is My Beloved. Officers and institution are clearly seen to be part of the corrupt Establishment in opposition to the individual innocent and as prone to materialism, cynicism, and disbelief, as the worst of secular officialdom.

The opening pages of Such is My Beloved point to the fundamental discrepancy between the official theory of the institution and its practice. In light of its supposed mission to the world, Fr. Dowling's daring discourses on "the building of a society on Christian principles" and "the inevitable separation between Christianity and the bourgeois world" (pp. 3-4) are profoundly ironic. And the irony is heightened as Callaghan insists that it is the very princes of the Church who are the most worldly: his priests, if not young, naive and ineffectual, or old, self-righteous and cynical, are public men possessed of considerable political guile. Bishop Foley in Such is My Beloved is a particularly sinister figure as he bows to the pressures of expedience and public opinion in skilfully manipulating his priest,

while Bishop Murray, during the club luncheon meeting with Kip Caley in More Joy in Heaven, is as class-conscious and interested in creature comforts as the rest of his money-dominated society and as reluctant as Judge Ford, despite his spiritual credentials, to believe in the possibility of Kip's redemption. Peggy Sanderson's father, as Protestant clergyman in The Loved and Lost, alone among successful churchmen suffers for his desire for social acceptance. Blatantly betraying his sacred trust, he permits racial prejudice to flourish in his original flock and then gains social and financial success, as the preacher of a wealthy city congregation, at the expense of his soul and his faith.

There is a tendency, too, to see orthodox belief in Mother Church as primarily a female phenomenon. While Callaghan mocks neither the ritual nor the comfort the ritual affords womankind, he and his masculine heroes can manage neither the emotional response nor the blind leap of faith. Constant association in the clerical mind of "fornication" with the "death of the spirit" (They Shall Inherit the Earth, p. 143) renders most of the men indifferent to spiritual advice, and there is a suggestion as well of perversity and sexual possessiveness in some of the female devotion.

It is the wife and mother of Harry Trotter who are the churchgoers and worshippers in Strange Fugitive. Despite the fact of her son's execution, Mrs. Thompson, alone of all

the characters in It's Never Over, draws upon reserves of spiritual strength through her association with the Church. In Such is My Beloved, Mrs. Schwartz is comforted at the moment of her death by Catholic ritual and a priest, as is Kip Caley's mother in More Joy in Heaven, while Sam Raymond envies "the calmness and the quiet wisdom" which her literal belief gives Anna Connel during her "contemplation of the mystery of existence" at the Papal funeral in A Passion in Rome (p. 287). All this is admirable and innocent enough, but not so the ulterior motives behind some of the female devotion. Sexual inhibitions and their source are reflected in Vera's choice of a priest as the ideal husband and father in Strange Fugitive, just as the self-centred demands of Mrs. Gibbons reveal her faith to be little more than an excuse for self-indulgence in A Broken Journey. Even the naive Fr. Dowling reflects upon the curious eagerness of his mother to see him made a priest (Such is My Beloved, p. 24), while the case of Tomaso Ferraro in A Passion in Rome illustrates only too clearly the motives of self-glorification and emasculation that lie behind some motherly sacrifices in the name of love.

Male heroes, on the other hand, experience singularly unsatisfactory relationships with the Church in its role of spiritual advisor, despite the validity of much of the advice. The priest who speaks to John Hughes in It's Never Over is perfectly correct to suspect a case of exacerbated ego behind

the hero's complaints of wounded dignity, as is the holy father who warns Harry Lane against the sin of inordinate pride in The Many Colored Coat. But both priests preface their remarks with blanket injunctions against sex which immediately alienate their listeners. Harry's priest claims, for example, that "carnality" is the root of all evil:

No matter what the story of your trouble . . . you can't understand it unless you see that it no doubt is rooted in your carnality. . . . Don't you see that fornication is the complete and final triumph of all the sins of the flesh? Even the sins of pride and vanity can be traced to a gratification of the senses, and all these great sins seem to flower in your fornication.

(The Many Colored Coat, p. 168)

Both heroes arrive at virtually the same moral conclusions as the priests before them, the impossibility of denying conscience and personal responsibility on the one hand, and the advisability of suspending judgment in favour of mercy on the other, but while Callaghan himself is honest enough to admit the spiritual debt he owes the clergy, neither John nor Harry admits the source of his inspiration, and both are seen to arrive at redemption primarily by themselves. Indeed, the route to redemption is obscured, Callaghan suggests, by the absurd dress in which good advice is clothed. Small wonder disaffection occurs. Sam Raymond, Callaghan's spokesman in A Passion in Rome, is an extreme example of masculine indifference to the forms of worship

and confession. He falls asleep in the confessional box during the recitation of the Pater Noster, and while he recognizes that the "priests with their burial rites were saying something to [Carla]," he personally finds they are speaking a "language he couldn't understand" (pp. 285-87).

While few of Callaghan's characters are faithful churchgoers, all of them notice churches. Reminders at once of man's loftiest aspirations, of the North American Puritan tradition, and of the Church's beleaguered position amongst other secular towers, church buildings appear to be an inevitable part of the moral landscape of the novels. Harry Trotter's guilty remarks upon hearing churchbells are typical:

you can't get away from it. It's right
in the centre of things.
(Strange Fugitive, p. 73)

But typical also is the fate of the Cathedral which burns down in the novel, only to be replaced by a Labour Temple and a new Metropolitan Office building.

In A Broken Journey, even in the midst of disillusionment, as she confronts her irrational, sensual self in the wilds of the Algoma countryside, Marion Gibbons notices a church. She sees a mountain peak which reminds her of "an immense, crude, rugged cathedral of rock."⁴¹ Clearly a reference to Roman Catholicism, Callaghan seems to be saying that human spiritual aspirations are as inherent a part of man's nature as his sexuality, a fact that

Marion has forgotten. But the novel attests as well to the demise of the Christian influence as brand new secular towers rise in an industrialized urban "wasteland":

Then [Peter] was silent again, looking over beyond the dark warehouses and across the flat, barren sandy stretch of reclaimed land as far as the new grain elevators, white, round, clean and solid in the moonlight as if they had just been polished and set down there in the level wasteland.

(A Broken Journey, p. 91)

Other characters in A Broken Journey also notice churches. Hubert compares, for example, the sudden access of clarity that comes upon him to "the feeling people used to be able to get by praying in very old churches in Europe" (A Broken Journey, p. 242). But the predominant mood of the novel is one of dreadful paralysis, of desperate longings and vain regrets that are only half-understood and scarcely expressed, and at once sexual and spiritual in nature.

Peter's confusion is typical:

That night he could not sleep. Outside a nighthawk was screeching and swooping over the low roofs. . . . The window drapes swayed sensuously in the light breeze. He suddenly asked himself what the journey north with Marion might have led to, wondering if there was some meaning behind it he could not understand: he tried to ponder the meaning of its magic as though he were close to an explanation that could be grasped intuitively; only it was like staring till your eye ached at the brilliant white peak of a mountain that could not quite be seen. . . . He could no more do without wishing, or feeling the hurt that went with wishing, than an

early Christian in a period of dreadful spiritual dryness could do without longing for God. He started to mutter as a child going to sleep mutters a rhyme, "Marion, Clarion, darion, Darien, the peaks of Darien, silent upon a peak in Darien."

(pp. 93-94)

The difficulty, of course, is that the characters insist upon making harsh judgments about each other when the truth lies somewhere in between blanket condemnation and undue praise. Public opinion has it, for example, that Mrs. Gibbons is either "an unusually devout woman" or "an old hussy beyond redemption" (A Broken Journey, p. 1). And the Church is partly to blame. Fr. Vincent Sullivan is as appalled by her venality as the rest and quite unable to offer any help:

It was a mild, warm night. He was walking very slowly. The Cathedral spire stuck up in the night sky above all the houses in the block. He was still breathing irregularly and feeling that he had been close to something immensely ugly and evil that had nearly overwhelmed him. He shook his head a little, because he still wanted to go on thinking that Mrs. Gibbons was one of the finest women in the parish, for his notion of what was good in the life in the parish seemed to depend upon such a belief. And as he walked slowly he felt, with a kind of desperate clarity, that really he had always been unimportant in the life around the Cathedral. He was still ashamed and had no joy at all in being a young priest.

(p. 145)

Fr. Dowling's cathedral in Such is My Beloved is also hard pressed for space:

The Cathedral was an old, soot-covered, imitation Gothic church that never aroused the enthusiasm of a visitor to the city. It had been in that neighborhood for so long it seemed just a part of an old city block.

(pp. 36-37)

And it has clearly brought some of the darkness and disregard upon itself by its medieval attitudes towards sex. It is significant that the good father's poetry reading and his most daring speculations about love should occur outside the sanctuary in the safety and sanity of his room, and it is equally significant that his last prayer for the prostitutes, after his reversal to that benighted tradition, takes place within the darkened cathedral and sweeps all rational thought from his mind:

And then, with his eyes closed, he was making no conscious prayer, using no word; his mind was swept clear of all thoughts so there was only a void and a darkness within him. But this most silent prayer was more intense than any he had ever made.

(p. 128)

While there is intensity here, the irony of a prayer to the Virgin Mary on behalf of the prostitutes is unmistakable; as the passage itself points out, his eyes were "closed" and "there was only a void and a darkness within him."

By the time of The Loved and the Lost (1951), the Church has almost completely disappeared. Certainly it is not regarded seriously by an affluent, status-conscious

society. While Peggy Sanderson readily accepts, as most of Callaghan's characters do not, that man's nature is a tangled web and insists undismayed that churches and leopards "go together" (p. 33), Jim McAlpine loses his faith and is unable to find it again. He searches without success for the little, old Romanesque church, first pointed out to him by Peggy. The towers of the new insurance building, however, remain clearly visible, symbol of his conformist and middle-class society's passion for possessions and security at the expense of involvement, risk, and possible loss (p. 158).

A veritable spate of churches appears, however, in Callaghan's last novel, A Passion in Rome, as Sam confronts in that city "the world that shaped [our] lives" (p. 170). While nature's forms often remind earlier characters of churches, here church architecture and religious ritual remind the hero of those natural truths the Church itself seems to have forgotten. Just as spiritual aspiration is natural to man, hence the resemblance of bluffs to "cathedral spires" in It's Never Over,⁴² so too is sexual desire, which is not, Callaghan suggests, readily distinguishable at its best from man's noblest aspirations and concerns. Thus, Roman Catholic rites in the novel unconsciously reflect the patterns of nature. The ritual of the Pope's funeral, for example, followed by the immediate choice of his successor, reminds the hero of the natural cycle of death and rebirth, and religious architecture ironically

attests, as Sam remarks upon gazing up at the dome and obelisk of Santa Sophia (p. 120), to sexual realities that Christianity would mistakenly denigrate or deny. The relationship of the new Pope to the Mother Church is also seen in terms of sexual metaphor, those of St. Paul ironically enough:

The Pope is the Vicar of Christ, isn't he?
 And Christ is to the Church as a husband
 is to a wife. Well, if His vicar dies,
 it leaves the Church as widow, doesn't it?
 But a widow who'll have a new bridegroom.
 (p. 242)

The speaker here is Anna Connel but Sam applauds her view. The point is, as the hero suggests, that such symbolism "could have a deeply religious implication" (p. 120). In this novel, his most explicit statement of his relationship to Western Christianity, Callaghan makes abundantly clear his distance from the puritan tradition of Mother Church.

III The Bible as Literature and A Theology of Imagination

Sam Raymond's indifference to Catholic ritual and the symbolic use of churches by the author are more accurate reflections of Callaghan's religious position than doctrinal differences alone. Readily admitting "there is no doubt I'm hopelessly corrupt theologically,"⁴³ while aiming, nevertheless, to "relate the Christian enlightenment to some timeless process of becoming,"⁴⁴ Callaghan proceeds by way of intuition to a set of personal convictions which owes more to his own aesthetic philosophy and the creative

process than to orthodox Christian belief, and whose expression in terms of religious symbol or jargon betrays ironic distance as much as their source. There is no doubt of his indebtedness to the tradition, but just as Priest was supplanted by Artist, faith is transformed by aesthetic philosophy and traditional religious symbolism put to literary, as opposed to devotional, use.

It seems to Sam Raymond, Callaghan's spokesman, that "all the doctrinal ideologies of his day had been fading into myth and literature, as the fixed opinions of the Greeks and Romans had become simply literature" (A Passion in Rome, p. 334). Certainly Callaghan's own approach to religious symbol and the use of Biblical parallel in his work is more in the tradition of artistic licence than of affirmation of literal belief. Although Christian symbolism and myth are used extensively in the novels of his middle periods, in works such as Such is My Beloved, They Shall Inherit the Earth, and More Joy in Heaven, for example, in every case the purpose is either structural or ironic as opposed to emblematic or confessional.

Parallels with the life of Christ inform, for example, Such is My Beloved and More Joy in Heaven, but the heroes are neither modern exempla of the holy passion, nor saintly sinners whose tragic suffering and inevitable failure can only be redeemed by means of Grace. Far from a feast of suffering in order to achieve mystical release,

or pious contemplation of man's fallen nature in aid of Christian resignation, the object of each novel is irony, and the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual hero is explored in order to expose an unfortunate waste of human potential.

Both Fr. Dowling and Kip Caley are guilty of what Callaghan regards as "monstrous egotism" in their belief that they can personally redeem the times,⁴⁵ but the irony rebounds more upon Christ as an impossible symbol than upon them as mortal men. Convinced that "there's a very thin borderline between innocence and crime," Callaghan finds himself "bored by pure innocence" and fascinated instead by the parallels between "sinner" and "saint."⁴⁶ It is clearly madness on Fr. Dowling's part, so mesmerized is he by the spectacle of the Cross, to attempt to emulate self-sacrificial Divine love in hopes of salvation out of time. His only real moral alternatives, Callaghan implies, lie this side of Heaven. On the other hand, Kip's crucifixion is probably preventable. As much his own as society's fault, Caley's temporal failure is the result of naiveté and fantasies of social acceptance, as well as a lack of responsibility on the part of society, and it is ultimately more regrettable than tragic. Obviously an ironic Saviour—society gets "the kind of hero [its] time deserves"⁴⁷—the question of whether there is "more joy in heaven" becomes irrelevant, as the novel demonstrates how

mankind is cut off in "some mean or desperate way"⁴⁸ from self-fulfillment this side of the grave.

Biblical myth and pattern informs They Shall Inherit the Earth as well. But Michael Aikenhead's movement as prodigal son, from sin through repentance and absolution to forgiveness, provides more in the way of irony and dramatic structure than pious illustration of Biblical story. It is his moral development, after all, which provides the model for his father's, and he regains an earthly, as opposed to spiritual, Paradise.

It is his use of "The Beatitudes" and the "Song of Songs" which reveals the uniqueness of Callaghan's approach most clearly. On the one hand, a Biblical text is used to refute Christian otherworldliness with irony, while on the other "the bold sensual phrases" of religious poetry stand in direct opposition to theological commentary (Such is My Beloved, p. 78). Far from religious exhortation to transcend the sensual self through spiritual striving, Callaghan interprets "The Beatitudes" as a call for self-realization and whole-hearted commitment to the world. Similarly his reading of the "Song of Songs" contradicts orthodox opinion. While Fr. Dowling's speculations about the nature of love are finally rejected by Bishop Foley as heretical, Callaghan clearly prefers them to passive acceptance of Holy Writ:

Father Dowling in the beginning may have loved [the prostitutes] in a general way and, of course, that was good. His love

for them became too concrete. How could it become too concrete? From the general to the particular, the conception expressed in the image. . . . From the word to the flesh, the word made flesh, from the general to the particular, the word made flesh, no, no, nonsense . . . then the general made concrete . . . no, no.

(Such is *My Beloved*, p. 135; italics mine.)

It is the good father's experience of the Bible as imaginative literature that has lead him to his perception of its human truth. Far from finally revealed truth⁴⁹ or Roman Catholic dogma, the poetry of the Bible is approached as metaphorical sign, and the most appropriate attitude towards it is one of awareness not reverential awe.

The natural opposition between Word and Flesh is an obsession in Callaghan's thought. Aware as a writer of the discrepancy between art and reality, between "words" and "the thing or person being described,"⁵⁰ he adopts a simplicity of style to prevent "separations" and is critical of "show-off" writers who draw more attention to themselves than to the truth: "The terrible vanity of the artist who wanted the word without the flesh."⁵¹ Similarly he inveighs against "dualism" in Christian thought.⁵² Feeling a compulsion himself to look at the world "freshly," he regards unquestioning conformity as a dereliction of the individual's moral duty and refers to it as an "escape into metaphor."⁵³ And he equates that "happy acceptance of reality" and "gay celebration of things as they were," to which he aspires, with "The word made flesh."⁵⁴