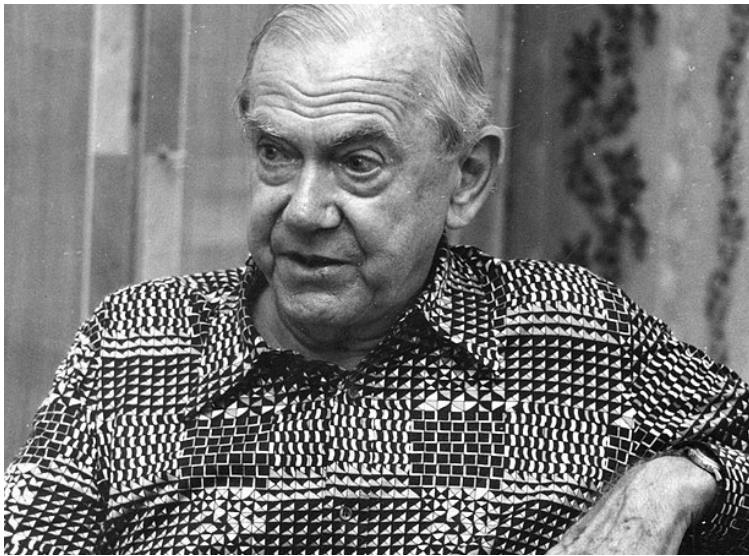




# INDIAN CATHOLIC MATTERS

A NEW HOME FOR THE COMMUNITY

## NAVIGATION



### Graham Greene’s Fiction: Through the Tropes of the Suffering Servant and Paul’s Hymn to Love

June 27, 2024 Team ICM Features

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Dr. Subhasis Chattopadhyay –

“[Unbelievers] are so far from any Christian view that they cannot enter my universe.”

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SOUL TALK ON GRANDPARENTS BY ADOLF WASHINGTON



JOIN THE FRANCISCANS

Graham Greene to Marcel Moré in *Conversations with Graham Greene* edited by Henry J. Donaghy and published in 1992.

“Faith. To believe that nothing of what we are able to grasp is God. Negative faith. But also, to believe that what we are unable to grasp is more real than what we are able to grasp.... To believe, finally, that what lies beyond our grasp appears nevertheless — hidden.” (Simone Weil qtd. in *How Graham Greene’s ‘Brighton Rock’ helped me become Catholic*, Jon M. Sweeney, *America: The Jesuit Review*, May 15, 2024)

Eternal things probably no longer matter to the thousands of college going students in India, whether Hindu or Roman Catholic, since they neglect the study of Graham Greene (1904-91) during their years as an English literature student. At any rate, Greene remains one of the greatest Roman Catholic novelists of all time although there was not even a single webinar on him during the COVID 19 lockdowns, and there are no seminars on him today in our country as of writing this essay. Yet, Graham Greene, a staple in Indian universities should be subjected to deep reading by both non-Christian students and Roman Catholic seminarians[i] too; if they both want to escape *acedia*. Greene’s novels are a therapy of desire. In fact, Greene should be read by anyone who is bored by the drudgery of life and of course, by students pursuing their dreams of becoming English teachers in India. May be, as Greene in the interview to Marcel Moré pointed out; he is entirely misunderstood by anyone who is not a Roman Catholic. Just before he told Moré that the ‘unbeliever’, which as a category is distinct from being a non-believer, cannot enter his “universe”. Greene had said that “even the most intelligent critics” are “unable to understand” his fiction if they were not Roman Catholics. This essay will try to make the non-Roman Catholic equipped to enter Greene’s “universe” and to help the Roman Catholic to

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Alphonsa: The First Indian Woman Christian Saint...

By Sr. Teresa Joseph, FMA – The feast day of St. Alphonsa

appreciate the necessity of engaging with Greene's works in 2024.

In 2024, we continue to have despots since human nature is fundamentally the same as it was during Greene's life — nothing has changed. Rather, we need to be aware of the numinous all the more and urgently, since AI is now capable of simulating both human and divine love. In other words, we are more at risk of being deceived by the inhuman which will eventually want us to become inhuman. Evil calls to evil in the same manner that true love calls out to the heart — *cor ad cor loquitur*. Graham Greene's writings are theodicies which show that the answer to hatred is never violence or reciprocal hate. It is for love that Christ took up His place on the rood and it is for love, that Christ continues to hang helplessly from His Cross. It is this helpless love of Christ for humanity, which finds its fullest expression in the novels and short stories of the most famous literary convert to Catholicism in the last century. Greene's nuanced presentation of the real behind all that is unreal will help us now and in the future in resisting the masks that AI will wear to seduce us to a sense of false comfort. When Greene wrote there was neither the internet, nor AI. But his works ricochet with the cries of lonely men and women trying to connect to each other, and when they eventually find that is impossible; they try to connect with God. More often than not, Greene finds traditional ways of experiencing God inadequate since rigid traditions run the risk of entrapping us in meaningless certitudes and rituals. One of the holiest men in his entire corpus, a Monsignor reasons thus:

Father Quixote thought: How many times I have felt guilty as he does without knowing why. Sometimes he envied the certitude of those who were able to lay down clear rules—Father Heribert Jone, his bishop, even the Pope. Himself, he lived in a mist, unable to see a path, stumbling. (*Monsignor Quixote*)

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Returning to the relevance of Greene today, among other issues we turn to the pressing issue of rising income inequalities throughout the world. Poverty is always accompanied by the rise of oligarchs who gravitate towards despots. Despots come to power through the support of business men who regulate various mafia. This is a universal phenomenon cutting across religions and ethnicities. Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) mapped this in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Within Continental literature, Thomas Mann (1875-1955) most memorably shows us the shallowness of business families and their transience leading to generational declines. *Buddenbrooks* (1901) is worth reading to understand how oligarchy and untrammelled consumerism have their inglorious ends inherent in them. Greene in a certain sense carries forward the legacies of writers like Mann and Joseph Conrad (1857-1924) in his novels by unceasingly resisting the totalitarian impulse which always lurks in our collective psyches. Conrad's miasmatic short stories and novels certainly influenced Greene. *Nostramo* (1904) stinks of the world and death. Greene was aware of aching poverty through his travels in Latin America and throughout the world as a journalist. He reacted to the poverty he encountered first-hand and thus made it his mission to further the theo-political programme of the Roman Church by writing fiction based on real dictators. Greene's activism is an apostolic activism finding expression through his fiction. The non-fiction of the political scientist, Arendt is nowhere known as much as the fictional accounts of Greene. But Arendt's influence is palpable in Greene's novel *The Comedians* (1966). Social activism, in the case of Graham Greene took the form of literary praxis.

The Roman Catholic Church in Latin America had responded to this unequal wealth distribution through the fiery movement of liberation theology. Much before liberation theology became a global academic sensation in

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Roman seminaries, Greene constructed his own answers to systemic sin. His works anticipate the liberation theology of the priest of the Order of Preachers, Gustavo Guitérrez (b.1928) much before Guitérrez became the toast of the Catholic world. In *The Comedians* set in Haiti, Greene calls for concrete action in the here and now for the cause of justice and social equality as he had done earlier in his earlier novels:

The Church is in the world, it is part of the suffering in the world, and though Christ condemned the disciple who struck off the ear of the high priest's servant, our hearts go out in sympathy to all who are moved to violence by the suffering of others. The Church condemns violence, but it condemns indifference more harshly. Violence can be the expression of love, indifference never. One is an imperfection of charity, the other the perfection of egoism.

Much earlier Dante (1265-1321) too had condemned fence-sitters as being the greatest reprobates ever. Greene's novels are postmodern in the sense that they make a case for the transformation of the schizoid being we encounter in Edvard Munch's (1863-1944) *The Scream* (1893) to a love-illuminated being rushing to what the Jesuit anthropologist, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) calls the Omega Point. For Graham Greene, our telos is de Chardin's Omega Point. In *Monsignor Quixote* (1982), one of Greene's most underrated but profound later novels, we have the Marxist Sancho wondering:

Why is it that the hate of man – even of a man like [the Spanish dictator] Franco – dies with his death, and yet love, the love which he had begun to feel for Father Quixote, seemed not to live and grow in spite of the final separation and the final silence – for how long, he wondered with a kind of fear, was it possible for that love of his to continue? And to what end?

This is Greene's message for humanity through his fiction, interviews and letters. Love alone endures. God's unconditional love for each of us is unwavering and no matter how dejected we feel, through the miasma, we know the sun always rises and YHWH is with us even in Sheol. This is why Graham Greene converted to Roman Catholicism against the wishes of his family while very young. It is not due to some humdrum logic that Greene converted, but he responded to the impulse of love which beckons each of us to see the absurdity of rationality and logic: "Logical thought does often lead to absurd situations" declares the Monsignor to Sancho; since as Greene declares in this novel — "a wholly rational world...is a dull world". The last time this sentiment was articulated clearly was by William Blake (1757-1827). Though the narrative style of Greene is realist; his conclusions are Blakean and thus, Romantic. In a very telling exchange in *A Burnt-Out Case*, Dr. Colin and the famous architect Query speak on the power of love. The doctor asks Query: "I think I have always liked my fellow men. Liking is a great deal safer than love. It doesn't demand victims. Who is your victim, Query"? Query's convictionless answer is "I have none now. I'm safe. I am cured." To be cured of love within the reign of Christ, best exemplified in the Pauline 'Hymn to Love'<sup>[ii]</sup>, is to be nothing in the eyes of both God and men. This essay is an effort at making Greene's universe comprehensible to non-Catholics who are either reading Greene or teaching him. It does no credit to impose alien worldviews on religious writers just to score academic brownie points. A literary work is not *sui generis*. Nor are novels without authors and therefore, howsoever readerly a text is; it should primarily be assessed and accessed through the lens of the author as much as that is possible bridging the decades which separate us from the writer and his world. To reiterate for the sake of emphasising a point missed often in Indian academic discussions, Graham Greene is the most important Roman Catholic novelist of the last century. To read him removing the Roman Catholic elements in his works, is to arrive at conclusions which

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were never the intentions of Greene. His intentions in writing are clear from his interviews, letters and autobiographical sketches. Such alien readings are plain wrong and heresies imputed to a devout Catholic.

Probably Graham Greene did not get the Nobel Prize in literature<sup>[iii]</sup> since he was a Roman Catholic. He is in good company. The crypto-Catholic<sup>[iv]</sup> philosopher turned writer; Iris Murdoch (1919-1990) too did not get the Nobel Prize for her fiction. Yet both Greene and Murdoch remain two of the best but underrated novelists of the last century.

Murdoch's novel about Anglican cloistered Benedictine nuns, *The Bell* (1958) is an instance of her crypto-Catholicism. The Benedictine Abbess in *The Bell* exhorts us to:

Have faith in God and remember that He will in His own way and in His own time complete what we so poorly attempt. Often we do not achieve for others the good that we intend; but we achieve something, something that goes on from our effort. Good is an overflow. Where we generously and sincerely intend it, we are engaged in a work of creation which may be mysterious even to ourselves – and because it is mysterious we may be afraid of it. But this should not make us draw back. God can always show us, if we will, a higher and a better way; and we can only learn to love by loving. Remember that all our failures are ultimately failures in love. Imperfect love must not be condemned and rejected, but made perfect. The way is always forward, never back.

This profound sense of the mystery of God which we find in Murdoch, we find in Greene too. Murdoch in her book, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (1999) blurs the distinction between an existentialist novel and what she terms, 'the mystical novel'. According to Murdoch, an existentialist novel falls short of answering the hard questions of life since:

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The existentialist response is the first and immediate expression of a consciousness without God. It is the heir of nineteenth-century Luciferian pride in the individual and in the achievements of science. It is, or tries to be, cheerfully godless. Even its famous gloom is a mode of satisfaction. From this point of view, man is God. The mystical attitude is a second response, a second thought about the matter, and reflects the uneasy suspicion that perhaps after all man is not God. (*Existentialists and Mystics*).

This broken and abject dasein, the *homo sacer* who desires to enter the Christian economy of salvation is indeed the subject of both Greene and Murdoch. They recreate in their novels the Judaeo-Christian trope of the Suffering Servant and show us the transformation of the *homo sacer* to *homo religious*. Though in *Existentialists and Mystics* Murdoch writes of Graham Greene and Muriel Spark (1918-2006) in the same vein, yet the time has arrived for us to assess Greene through the mimetic representations of both the Suffering Servant<sup>[v]</sup> and John Caputo's (b.1940) weak God, or what Caputo terms, 'the theology of the event'. Graham Greene's *Brighton Rock* (1938), *The Power and the Glory* (1940), *The Heart of the Matter* (1948) and *A Burnt-Out Case* (1960) are all novels which have ontic moorings in evil, but they teleologically gesture at what Murdoch would go on to term, in an altogether different context, the sovereign good. The Suffering Servant has to be kenotic because of the unconditional covenantal love that binds God to humanity. The Incarnation, or 'the theology of the event' had occurred since God so loved the world that He sent His only Son to pitch His home in this excrement called *samsara*. Greene's fiction is informed by this unwavering love of God for man. In turn, Greene's novels are love letters of humanity crying out in agony in its long and unending loneliness to God. This is no mean feat — Greene is an heir to Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). From Nietzsche, Greene learnt to go beyond the



Aristotelian dictum of excluding the middle within dyads. In other words, Greeneland is a rebuttal to the Kantian categorical imperatives as far as they are presented by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in a reductionist manner. Greene on the other hand, going beyond Kant, while never rejecting radical evil and the sovereignty of the Good, maps the topographies of sin and redemption, hatred and love, despair and hope and Satan and God in such a way that the reader does not find in Greene an easy author. Greene is as sublime as William Blake as he is unlike the Willa Cather (1873-1947) of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) or Georges Bernanos's (1888-1948) *The Diary of a Country Priest* (1936). Greene's heroes are already defeated and burnt-out in the eyes of an unforgiving world which later Ayn Rand (1905-1982) would come to write of in her fiction. Greeneland is absolutely the polar opposite of Rand-land.

A diocesan priest's vocation is often the most misunderstood. Yet it is the humble parish priest who is available at all times to a simpler lot, who happen to be his parishioners. Parishioners rarely study at the level of their parish priest; as then, so now. The priest has to study theology and philosophy among other subjects. Therefore, there is often an intellectual disconnect between the interiority of the priest and his flock. Not always, but sometimes. Hear the priest, in *The Power and the Glory*, tell unimaginably poor Mexicans who only have him to minister the sacraments to them:

He said, Pray that you will suffer more and more and more. Never get tired of suffering. The police watching you, the soldiers gathering taxes, the beating you always get from the *jefe* because you are too poor to pay, smallpox and fever, hunger...that is all part of heaven—the preparation. Perhaps without them, who can tell, you wouldn't enjoy heaven so much. Heaven would not be complete. And heaven. What is heaven? Literary phrases form what seemed

now to be another life altogether—the strict quiet life of the seminary—became confused on his tongue: the names of precious stones: Jerusalem the Golden. But these people had never seen gold.

This is the disconnect that we mentioned above. The quiet academic life of the seminary and the chaotic life of being chased by an apparently morally self-righteous Lieutenant, unnamed like the priest who is convinced that there is no God at all looking out for us:

It infuriated him [the lieutenant] to think that there were still people in the state who believed in a loving and merciful God. There are mystics who are said to have experienced God directly. He was a mystic, too, and what he had experienced was vacancy—a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all.

This diocesan priest like Monsignor Quixote has to single-handedly fight the nihilism one encounters in the world qua samsara. In the case of the nameless priest in *The Power and the Glory*, either his peers have compromised with the system; or they have fled. But Christ-like this priest, who is acutely aware of his unworthiness, keeps on working where he has been planted. He blossoms where he had been planted — this is a theological truth which he embodies.

And unlike Religious within the Catholic Church, his community is his flock. That makes his presence itself a sign against the times. Whereas a Religious can afford to cut herself literally from the world, a parish priest has to be available for everything ranging from confessions at odd hours to running to the homes of the mortally ill to administer extreme unction. In this, unlike Religious, a diocesan priest has no friend, no community — he is as it were, thrown into the world in the best Heideggerian sense of being thrown into an agony-filled world. But unlike the

Heideggerian being, the diocesan priest has to act in the here and now to change death-oriented beings to life-oriented beings. They have to become what the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) had wanted humanity to become post the theology of the event: life-oriented beings. These beings (dasein) are neither to be Nietzsche's overmen, nor Shavian supermen; rather, Rahner and Greene want humanity to be set ablaze with the love that can only be found in the Covenant. In this sense, each of Graham Greene's heroes not merely critique modernity but are total negations of what modernity in Europe and literature stands for. At least, that nihilist modernity deriving from Nietzsche and culminating in Jean Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) misleading book, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). *Being and Nothingness* is a very weak and simplistic rejoinder to Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). Due to paucity of space, it is impossible to work out the entire anxiety of influences that Greene had to negotiate with in his fiction.

No wonder that generations of Nobel committee members could not judge laterally since wokeism is not a recent phenomenon. The fugitive whiskey priest of *The Power and the Glory* is a diocesan priest whose existential loneliness leads him to become an alcoholic. We demand holiness from our religious leaders. Greene questions the very nature of holiness and shows in *The Power and the Glory*, as also in his other novels, what we may call 'the holiness game'. Yet this nameless and stigmatised priest is the hero of this novel. For this priest is true to his vocation. In a proto-ecumenical manner, Greene shows how an English Protestant teenager, Coral Fellows shelters him from the relentless Marxist hunters trying to ferret him out. While Roman Catholics do not always understand his vocation; this young girl who has herself lost any belief in God at ten, can understand the indelible mark YHWH has branded the priest with:

He [the priest] said: "In Mexico City now they are saying Benediction. The bishop's there ... Do you imagine he ever thinks ...? They don't even know I'm alive."

She said: "Of course you could—renounce."

"I don't understand."

"Renounce your faith," she said, using the words of her European History.

He said: "It's impossible. There's no way. I'm a priest. It's out of my power."

The child [Coral Fellows] listened intently. She said: "Like a birthmark"

The priest is a fallen man in the eyes of the world; but then who is not fallen and sinful and is it not that God calls each one by their names? Greene asks this over and over in his novels. Systemic sin is woven into the woof of the world and humanity is inconstant in its love for God. But God is unwavering in His love for those who are His own. Those whom He calls His by name are forever His. Hosea's wife betrayed him; but Hosea never deserted his wife. Similarly, the diocesan parish priest can never leave his parishioners. The nameless priest tells Coral Fellows that he can never flee from his parish.

Anecdotally, by Greene's own recollections, he once went to visit the stigmatist of Padua — St. Padre Pio (1887-1968) who was known to be able to read hearts. Greene ran away in shame before even meeting the Saint. He was so ashamed of his own life spent womanising and in mortal sin. Yet, Greene himself was able to create characters who were deeply troubled by their Catholic selves and very worldly contra-Catholic lives. One wonders whether it is Greene howling in the wilderness through the priest crying out that he is unworthy of the love of his flock:

O God, forgive me – I am a proud, lustful, greedy man. I have loved authority too much. These people are martyrs – protecting me with their own lives. They deserve a martyr to care for them – not a man like me, who loves all the wrong things. (*The Power and the Glory*)

In a novel not much read anymore; since it is easier to watch it on online streaming platforms; we have a detective novel of sorts. This novel is based on G.K. Chesterton's (1874-1936) Father Brown detective novels more than anyone else's novels. In an interview to Christopher Burstall in 1968, Greene had said that "Pinkie took hold" of him, and Greene "realised [that he] wasn't going to write a detective story at all. All that remains of the detective story is the original murder" of the gang leader Kite which sets off a chain of events apparently necessitated by the plot. In reality, within Greeneland, these events are propelled by YHWH since YHWH is the Lord of history. It is a loosely hound-of-heaven-chasing-each-character in a romance novel. And has elements of the hard-boiled noir. We are speaking here of *Brighton Rock* which has it all — gang wars, turf-wars, affairs and the Unitarian spirit at its best in the person of Ida Arnold. We have the eternal war for souls between God and Legion. No novel by Greene is complete without this cosmic battle. Greene's primary concern is the salvation of the soul. Everything else is secondary in his fiction. The Nobel Laureate J. M. Coetzee (b.1940) in his *Introduction* to the 2004 Vintage edition of *Brighton Rock* rightly observed that Ida Arnold does not measure up to the moral standards of Greene's Catholicism:

Though Ida's view seems in the end to triumph, it is one of Greene's subtler achievements to put it in doubt as perhaps blinkered and tyrannical. In the end the story belongs not to Ida but to Rose and Pinkie, for they are prepared, in however juvenile a way, to confront ultimate questions, while she is not.

And even about Pinkie, this is what Greene had to say to Christopher Burstall in the interview mentioned earlier:

I [Greene] wanted to make people believe that he [Pinkie] was a sufficiently evil person almost to justify the notion of Hell. I wanted to introduce a doubt of Pinkie's future in the words of the priest, who speaks of the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God, a doubt whether even a man like that could possibly merit eternal punishment.

*Brighton Rock* in a certain sense is more about radical Kantian evil than any other work by Greene. But the telos of evil in this novel, as in all other works by Greene, is not eternal damnation. Pinkie's thoughts about love and marriage are simultaneously Roman Catholic and demonic:

He [Pinkie] had won a move and lost a move: they couldn't make her [Rose] give evidence, but she knew.... She loved him, whatever that meant, but love was not an eternal thing like hatred and disgust...The truth came home to him with horror that he had got to keep her love for a lifetime—he would never be able to discard her...the registry office marriage was as irrevocable as a sacrament. Only death could ever set him free.

Throughout the novel, Pinkie's views are utterly demonic. He does not see marriage as an anthropomorphic indissoluble call by God to two people of opposite sex and gender, as the Catholic Church teaches; rather Pinkie in the most 'secular way', here used in a pejorative way, thinks of marriage as a tool to evade imprisonment. Ironically he feels imprisoned. The aim of a Christian marriage is to allow the fecundity of YHWH reflect in the most basic and essential theo-anthropological unit of human civilisation: the Christian family. Instead in the best Manichean way possible, that is, in the best heretical manner, Pinkie is repulsed by physical intimacy. Pinkie can only conceive of the human and righteous need for

intimacy as “a sickness.” Pinkie’s inability to love Rose completely, body and soul, through an autonomous act of kenosis on his part, is contrary to the construction of the human person within Roman Catholic tradition and dogma regarding the sacrament of marriage. The Church does not consider sexuality within marriage to be even a venial sin if the end is to allow God to create ex nihilo new lives. The non-consummation of a marriage is tantamount to preventing God from acting in history in the future. A married couple is called to an exclusive relationship with each other which cannot be dissolved by any created being. Only death can part one from the other. In Pinkie’s case, he seeks death as an escape from Rose who loves him unconditionally. Rose, in this novel, is a lesser type of the Suffering Servant. In no way is she Christlike. She is at the most, a good Catholic:

“But you do believe, don’t you,” Rose implored him,  
“you think it’s true?”

“Of course it’s true,” the Boy said. “What else could there be?” he went scornfully on. “Why,” he said, “it’s the only thing that fits. These atheists, they don’t know nothing. Of course there’s Hell. Flames and damnation,” he said with his eyes on the dark shifting water and the lightning and the lamps going out above the black struts of the Palace Pier, “torments.”

“And Heaven too,” Rose said with anxiety, while the rain fell interminably on.

“Oh, maybe,” the Boy said, “maybe.”

While Pinkie keeps emphasising hellfire and damnation throughout Brighton Rock, Rose keeps on emphasizing the sovereign good. “Hell lay about him in his infancy” is Greene’s stark comment about Pinkie. In *Brighton Rock* “Good and evil lived in the same country, spoke the same language, came together like old friends, feeling the same completion” and thus Greenland mimetically enacts the Fall, the Original Lapse. The weltanschauung of *Brighton Rock* reflects the consequences of Original Sin. Yet, within

Catholicism, this sin is a 'felix culpa'. And the Suffering Servant has already arrived to redeem all humanity. In this novel through the love of Rose, the Suffering Servant who is the Lord of history, acts as He had once acted on behalf of the people of the Covenant. This novel is a theological commentary on the soteriology of the conjugal life as illustrated earlier. *Brighton Rock* further interrogates Godless piety and questions whether Godless goodness is not merely an oxymoron. By Godlessness, Greene, unambiguously and explicitly states that there is no salvation possible outside the Roman Catholic Church. Though we need to take this with a pinch of salt. The Church of Greene's time is no longer; it has been through the Second Vatican Council and therefore, some of Greene's notions will seem outdated to contemporary Roman Catholics. However, in their essence, Greene's contentions are strictly orthodox and in line with the Magisterium of the Church. But, present day Traditional Catholics will agree with Greene's ideas in their entirety as found in *Brighton Rock*. For instance, Ida Arnold is a morally good human being who in the Aristotelian sense of eudaimonia, tries to rescue Rose from the clutches of Pinky and his minions. But Greene problematises Ida Arnold's character in such a manner that we are left asking whether she is a good person at all. Coetzee quoted above is ample proof that Greene is not kind towards Ida. It is not that Greene has anything against her, but it is against Ida's religious relativism that Greene reacts. Graham Greene insisted he was a writer who happened to be Roman Catholic. But the question is, would he have been a writer at all had he not converted to Roman Catholicism? Greene is that mystical novelist of Murdoch who asserts that God alone is in an otherwise indifferent and cooling world where little girls become demonic since the "world was in [their] heart[s] already, like the small spot of decay in a fruit" (*The Power and the Glory*) and little boys carry hell around them even when they grow up; of Pinkie Greene writes that "the horror of the world lay like infection" in Pinkie's throat.



*Brighton Rock* accomplishes its theo-cultural work for couples as *The Power and the Glory* does its theological work for Catholic clerics. To deny Graham Greene his place in literary studies is to silence our own consciences. But for Greene, the world would not have known of R.K. Narayan (1906-2001). The time has come to rethink Greene in the light of Patristics and Catholic dogma, which is a different and larger academic project. Greene's genius lies in the fact that he did not write bitter sweets works on the lives of Roman Catholic nuns (women Religious) like Rumer Godden (1907-1998) did in her bestsellers, *Black Narcissus* (1939) and *In This House of Brede* (1969) or even in her *Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy* (1979). It is for another day that we will discuss the effect Greene's thrillers had on John le Carré (1931-2020).

#### Endnotes

[i] Fr. Dwight Longenecker wrote on January 25, 2019 in the *National Catholic Register*, that Graham Greene is flawed in his portrayal of the sacrament of the priesthood since "Over the years I've met lots of priests. I've known very clever and accomplished priests and very simple and ignorant priests. I've met vain and pompous priests, priests with anger problems, drinking problems and sex problems, but most of them have been good, hard working men with simple tastes and a modest way about them. I've never met any who seem as morose, self-absorbed and complicated as the whiskey priest."

Greene's story (like most of his stories) is flawed because it doesn't account for the simplicity and clarity that the sacrament of confession brings to the complexities of the human heart. Was this because Greene himself labored so long in sins that he knew were wrong? Maybe."

<https://www.ncregister.com/blog/graham-greene-s-whiskey-priest>, accessed at 12:09 pm Indian Standard Time, 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2024.

For a contrasting view, read Constance T. Hull's frank appraisal of the current global clerical crisis in her October 21, 2021 essay *The Power & Glory of Christ Still Works, Even Through Sinful Priests* published in the *Catholic Exchange*, <https://catholicexchange.com/the-power-glory-of-christ-still-works-even-through-sinful-priests/> accessed at 12:18 pm, Indian Standard Time, on 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2024.

She writes:

“Years later, I have seen a lot more in the priesthood, so I can understand the novel at a much deeper level. Those who are offended seem to miss the profound truths at work in the novel. As the main character, an unnamed “whiskey priest”—who has fostered an illegitimate daughter and is an alcoholic—flees in fear and cowardice from the Mexican authorities, the sacred dignity of the priest is constantly on display throughout the story...The priest has been on the run for years from government police who want to execute him. Interestingly, he does not accept the option given to him to give up his public ministry and marry. Something in him rebels against this surrender, even though many priests he knows capitulated...The whiskey priest no longer prays the Divine Office and leaves his breviary after one of his failed attempts to flee by boat. He still hears confessions, celebrates Mass in secret when able to do so, and baptizes. But he often does so begrudgingly and knows he is completely unworthy of the sacred office he's been entrusted with. He knows he is a coward and a drunk who holds God in his hands and feeds God to His people... Most humiliating of all, members of the laity are willing to sacrifice their own lives for a scoundrel like him because he bears the indelible mark placed upon his soul by the Eternal High Priest through his bishop. [The priest says] ... “These people are martyrs—not a man like me, who loves all the wrong things. Perhaps I had better escape—if I tell people how it was over here, perhaps they will send a good man with a fire of love...” Hull goes on to contextualise Greene in our times which is crucial, since if any fiction is not relevant to us in the here and now, then that is not

literature. She further writes “In light of the 2002 and 2018 clergy sex abuse scandals, the weakness of fallen men and the evil that runs through human hearts has been on full display within the priesthood. The book, while fictional, is not far off the mark. It has been the case that many priests down through Church history have fled from the heights of their calling when confronted with suffering or sacrifice...Reality [is] complicated, disappointing, and distressing. The utter failure, disregard, greed, clericalism, sin, and indifference of the clergy sex abuse cover-ups and subsequent bureaucratic response have shown us this hard truth. We hope and pray for saints, but persevere when we are given “whiskey priests” instead.” At the end of the day, we are only human, and Christ came for the sick, not for the healthy. Greene has done much to alleviate the shame that seminarians and priests feel in going against the teachings of the Church. Seminarians would do well to read *The Power and the Glory* if no other books by Greene. It is the sad state of affairs in Catholicism and Hinduism, that consecrated women and men are wracked with guilt because society and their followers forget that all of us have clay feet. Heros and hero-worshipping are signs of moral weakness in any society. The weak need heroes. Strength lies in carrying on day after boring day, often doing jobs with no jazz. This author has met many Catholic priests who are overworked, under-appreciated and abject. They had thought that they will encounter God in the work; some do, some sometimes do but many are struggling. *The Power and the Glory* will soothe their souls.

[ii] “And now I will show you the best Way of all.

If I speak all tongues of men and of angels, but speak without love, I am no more than a noisy gong or clanging cymbal. If I can prophesy and fathom all mysteries and knowledge and if I have so much faith that I can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all my possessions to the poor, or even give my body to be burnt, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind and envies no one. Love is never boastful, nor conceited, nor rude. It does not insist on its own way. It does not take offense, nor does it keep a record of wrongs. Love does not enjoy evil-doing but enjoys the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance.

Love never ends. Prophecy will cease. Tongues will be stilled. Knowledge will fail. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the Fulfillment comes, the partial will be done away with. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I saw as a child, I thought and reasoned as a child. When I became a man, I put away the things of a child. Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror, but then we shall see him face to face. I do not know everything now, but then I will, just as God completely understands me.

In a word, there are three things that last forever: faith, hope, and love: but the greatest of them all is love.”

1 *Corinthians* 12:31-13:13.

The reason for giving this entire Hymn here is to make Indians aware of this central tenet of Christianity. Without this understating of the primacy of love, students of Greene and other Catholic writers will often digress into non-Christian issues which were never the intentions of these writers. While such digressions seem learned being leftist at their cores; scholars are wrong to impute these to writers like Graham Greene. This endnote is not meant for scholars but more for Indian students struggling with Greene.

[iii] For Greene's rejection by the Nobel Committee and machinations within the Nobel Committee, see the 1967 papers of the proceeding of the Nobel Committee judges. "Greene was supported by the committee's chairman, Anders Osterling, who called him "an accomplished observer whose experience encompasses a global

diversity of external environments, and above all the mysterious aspects of the inner world, human conscience, anxiety and nightmares”.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/08/nobel-archives-show-graham-greene-might-have-won-1967-prize>

accessed on 25th June, 2024 at 11:04, Indian Standard Time.

Even after showing “the mysterious aspects of the inner world” with all its concomitant anxieties and nightmare, Greene did not make the mark that year or, for that matter, any year.

Reddit is often a very perceptive source for real criticism as against the abracadabra that passes off in the name of literary criticism in academic circles, which is more often than not contaminated with bad prose or, Spivakese.

Seven years ago, a Redditor, PunkShocker, put Greene’s missing the Nobel Prize for Literature in perspective. Here is PunkShocker in her/his words:

“*The Power and the Glory*, *The Heart of the Matter*, *Brighton Rock*, and even to some extent *The End of the Affair*, all explore deep questions of human doubt, pain, loss, triumph, etc. Those aspects are at the heart of some of the best literature.

Let me compare him to two Nobel laureates I do know well. I don’t think Greene was the genius Faulkner was, and he was only as lyrical as Faulkner in brief moments—but they’re powerful moments (“You cannot conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the ... appalling ... strangeness of the mercy of God”). At his best, he was at least as good as Hemingway was at *his* best. But Greene was consistently good, whereas Hemingway had ups and downs. Hemingway started strong but wavered in the middle to the end of his career (*The Old Man and the Sea* excepted). Greene maintained a consistent depiction of human frailty, even in his spy novels, throughout his career. The main difference between a Greene and a Faulkner or a Greene

and a Hemingway, is that I don't think Greene revolutionized literature in the way the other two did. Greene just wrote what he wrote, but he wrote exceptionally.

I haven't read all of his books, but I've read more than a few, and they're consistently good. Was he the most deserving of the 1967 nominees? Evidently not, according to the Academy. But he was of the right caliber, and I'm just glad to know that's being acknowledged."

[https://www.reddit.com/r/literature/comments/7pjwpt/nobel\\_archives\\_show\\_graham\\_green\\_might\\_have\\_won/](https://www.reddit.com/r/literature/comments/7pjwpt/nobel_archives_show_graham_green_might_have_won/) accessed 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2024 at 11:18 am. Brackets, italics are all PunkShocker's. The only point that I disagree with PunkShocker is that Greene did revolutionise certain genres of fiction. It is unfair to compare him with William Faulkner. Greene revolutionised genre literature and as Iris Murdoch points out, he single-handedly gave form to the mystical novel which in his case also happened to be spin-off in many cases, of the hardboiled noir of the 1920s and 1930s.

[iv] "After the barbarities of the Second World War, she [Iris Murdoch] flirted with Roman Catholicism and wrote admiringly of an Anglican community of Benedictine nuns in *The Bell*. Like Simone Weil, whom she admired tremendously, Murdoch, though, never took the step of joining the Roman Catholic Church." From J. Robert Baker's 'Review Essay' in *Christianity & Literature*, Vol. 57, No. 2, titled, *Christian Sensibility in Our Un-Christian Age: Two Approaches to Iris Murdoch's Moral Depth*, Winter 2007. Simone Weil's (1909-1943) observations on suffering and pain had been summarily discarded by Greene but we need not agree with Greene since his texts are readerly texts.

[v] Behold, my servant shall act wisely;

he shall be high and lifted up,

and shall be exalted.

As many were astonished at you—

his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,

and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

so shall he sprinkle many nations.

Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,

for that which has not been told them they see,

and that which they have not heard they understand.

Who has believed what he has heard from us?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

For he grew up before him like a young plant,

and like a root out of dry ground;

he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,

and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men,

a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

and as one from whom men hide their faces

he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs

and carried our sorrows;

yet we esteemed him stricken,

smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was pierced for our transgressions;

he was crushed for our iniquities;

upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;

we have turned—every one—to his own way;

and the Lord has laid on him

the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,

yet he opened not his mouth;

like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,

and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,

so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away;

and as for his generation, who considered

that he was cut off out of the land of the living,

stricken for the transgression of my people?

And they made his grave with the wicked

and with a rich man in his death,

although he had done no violence,



and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;

he has put him to grief;

when his soul makes an offering for guilt,

he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;

the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;

by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,

make many to be accounted righteous,

and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,

and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,

because he poured out his soul to death

and was numbered with the transgressors;

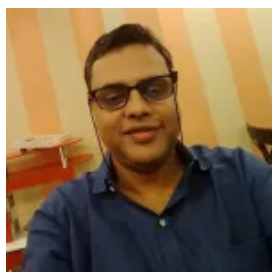
yet he bore the sin of many,

and makes intercession for the transgressors. *Isaiah*  
52:13–53:12.

I have given this extensive quotation since most Indians are not acquainted with the trope of the Suffering Servant found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, their exegesis of Greene's corpus continues to be from within leftist hermeneutics which Greene directly countered and has nothing to do with either Greene or (Indian) Christianity for that matter. Without understanding the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, neither Greene, nor Christianity will make sense.

And without this, there can be no understanding of Christ as the Suffering Servant. Unless this is understood, John D. Caputo's book, *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event* (2006) cannot be understood. For that matter the Christian understanding of a God shocked and shamed into helplessness cannot be comprehended by most Indians. Thus, their assessments of poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins and writers like Greene would be mostly off the mark. A good starting place for understanding the Crucifixion is Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God* (1972). A non-scholarly observation is that generations of scholars and students study Christian thinkers and writers without first coming to terms with the Christian worldview which hinges around the weakness of a powerful God. It is akin to studying Raja Rao without knowing Advaita Vedanta, or non-qualified non dualism. *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* by Israel Knohl, translated by David Maisel (2000) provides an excellent discussion of the Suffering Servant in the Qumran Scrolls. Needless to say, the discovery of these Scrolls has transformed Judaeo-Christian studies. In the context of Graham Greene, every character who serves others in *A Burnt-Out Case* is a type of the Suffering Servant. But the best example is the fugitive priest at Mexico in *The Power and the Glory*. Yet my statements here are too general and one hopes to expand these ideas later in a monograph. The connection between Isaiah and Greene is to date absent from all recognised academic databases.

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Dr. Subhasis Chattopadhyay studied the Bible, Formative Spirituality and Hinduism formally. He is a Hindu theologian with interests in Roman Catholicism. He has been a judge of the

Sahitya Akademi. In 2022, he gave the prestigious de Nobili Endowment Lecture at the International Jesuit Centre of Philosophical Excellence at Chennai. His reviews

from 2010 to 2021 in *Prabuddha Bharata* have often been showcased by Ivy League Presses. His doctoral work was on Patristics and the Problem of Evil in Cormac McCarthy and Stephen King read synoptically. Such a synoptic reading is a first in the world. In the late 2000s, he contributed prolifically to *The Herald*, which is the Archdiocesan newspaper of Calcutta. He believes in the transparency that free, online scholarship provides to independent scholars. Further, he has qualifications in the behavioral sciences. He writes for *Indian Catholic Matters* and *ESamskriti*. This article on Graham Greene is only a draft which is going to be published in a much more expanded fashion, as a book. He has again begun writing for *The Herald*.

CATHOLICISM

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GRAHAM GREENE

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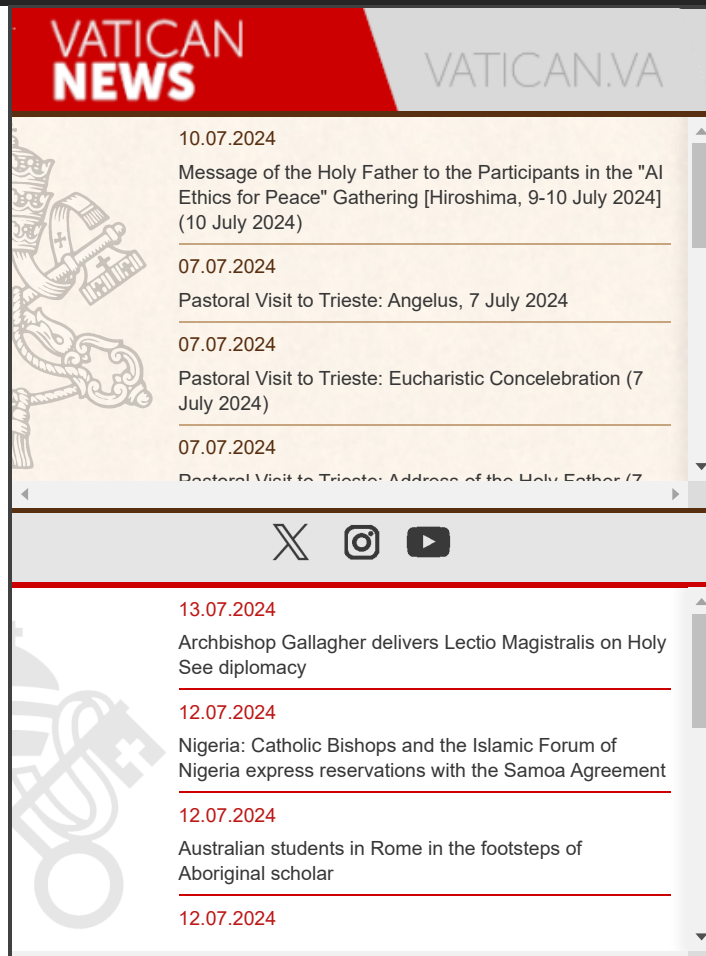
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The screenshot shows the Vatican News website interface. At the top, there is a red header with the text "VATICAN NEWS" and a grey header with "VATICAN.VA". Below the headers, there is a list of news articles. The first article is dated 10.07.2024 and is titled "Message of the Holy Father to the Participants in the 'AI Ethics for Peace' Gathering [Hiroshima, 9-10 July 2024] (10 July 2024)". The second article is dated 07.07.2024 and is titled "Pastoral Visit to Trieste: Angelus, 7 July 2024". The third article is dated 07.07.2024 and is titled "Pastoral Visit to Trieste: Eucharistic Concelebration (7 July 2024)". The fourth article is dated 07.07.2024 and is titled "Pastoral Visit to Trieste: Address of the Holy Father (7 July 2024)". Below the list of articles, there is a social media bar with icons for X, Instagram, and YouTube. Below the social media bar, there is a list of news articles. The first article is dated 13.07.2024 and is titled "Archbishop Gallagher delivers Lectio Magistralis on Holy See diplomacy". The second article is dated 12.07.2024 and is titled "Nigeria: Catholic Bishops and the Islamic Forum of Nigeria express reservations with the Samoa Agreement". The third article is dated 12.07.2024 and is titled "Australian students in Rome in the footsteps of Aboriginal scholar". The fourth article is dated 12.07.2024 and is titled "Australian students in Rome in the footsteps of Aboriginal scholar".

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