Dogmatism, Materialism and Faith in Graham Greene's Prose

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Abstract
This article deals with materialism, religious dogmatism and faith in Graham Greene's novels The Power and the Glory (1940), The Heart of the Matter (1948), and the short story "The Hint of an Explanation" (1954). The aim of the paper is to elucidate the nature of the author's attitude to the relation between faith, logical reasoning and urges for material wants. For the purposes of delineating some of the basic philosophical, social and psychological principles concerning faith, logical reasoning and materialism the article aims at providing an explanation based on theories developed by Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx and Abraham Maslow.

Keywords
Graham Greene, spirituality, dogmatism, materialism

Graham Greene is one of the main purveyors of the Catholic novel in 20th century English literature. Although initially an atheist, in the course of his life Greene became seriously concerned with religiousness and by dint of unconventional exploring the paradoxes of faith, he developed his own distinctive literary style in which troubled characters are significantly affected by religious doubts and an uneasy conscience. The historical and political background of the first half of the 20th century had a strong impact on the author's literary style. As Mark Bosco observes, the 1920s and 1930s was a difficult period marked by the aftermath of war atrocities, economic catastrophes and numerous political disappointments. This was a period in which rekindling of religious institutions was sought as a means of escaping from the violence and meaninglessness of the interwar world. Among those who adopted religion as a novel approach to life were individuals belonging to the intelligentsia who began to question the validity of religious dogmatism, with Graham Greene emerging as a leading voice.

To trace and explain the origins of Greene's interest in conflicts between religious dogmatism and faith, Norman Sherry notes that during adolescence Greene underwent Jungian psychiatric treatment as a consequence of his previous suicide attempts. The therapy was aimed at the spiritual dimension of his consciousness with the goal of making young Greene attentive to his own voice, his inner God. In Sherry's words: "That's the whole point of Jung's analysis – to unite your conscious mind with an unconscious God in you."[1] However, later in Greene's live, namely after converting to Catholicism, his inner notion of spirituality started to collide with the official teaching of the Catholic Church, resulting in a series of doubts and a crisis of conscience. Greene explored the tension between the dogmatic teaching and his own concept of spirituality as inspiration for his writings in which the discrepancy between materialism, dogmatism and faith seem to take the form of the disagreement between religion as an institutionalized set of dogmatic laws and the spirituality of personal faith, a conflict that will be analysed in this article through three of Greene's writings.

In *The Power and the Glory*, a novel set in 1920s Mexico after a communist revolution, these relations take the form of providing religious services for money. The plot revolves around an elderly Catholic "whisky priest" who, troubled by his conscience, is hunted by a young communist officer whose objective is to catch and execute the

1 Norman Sherry, *The Life of Graham Greene* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1989), 97.

priest in an attempt to secularize the country. In the priest's understanding, materialism and spirituality do not function as two mutually exclusive elements, but they merge into one entity. In fact, the priest employs elements of materialist reasoning whenever he is provided with a chance to receive payment for his clerical services. When he arrives at one village he is asked to baptize local children and immediately starts to estimate the possible profit:

> *He asked sharply, "How many children are there here—unbaptized?"*
> *"Perhaps a hundred, father."*
> *He made calculations: there was no need to arrive in Las Casas then as a beggar; he could buy a decent suit of clothes, find a respectable lodging, settle down ... He said, "You must pay one peso fifty a head."*
> *"One peso, father. We are very poor."*
> *"One peso fifty."*[2]

As Lois Tyson explains through Marxian theory:

> *Commodification is the act of relating to objects and persons in terms of their exchange value or sign-exchange value. For Marxism, a commodity's value lies not in what it can do (use value) but in the money or other commodities for which it can be traded (exchange value) or in the social status it confers on its owner (sign-exchange value).*[3]

The unnamed priest exchanges material value for spiritual nourishment. In other words, he trades God for money. As for his personal justification of the transaction, he soothes his conscience by recalling a statement once uttered by his mentor priest: "They don't value what they don't pay for,"[4] a relation which from a Marxist perspective suggests that in order to make the poor appreciate the numinous, use value must be substituted by exchange value. Here, it might be of particular interest to analyse the process of commodifying God for money from the perspective of those who are willing to pay for it – the poor.

Erich Fromm believes that the need for religiousness, the need to transcend the realm of mundane reality, is one of the basic elements deeply rooted in what is in Jungian psychology described as "a collective unconscious."[5] Having touched upon the theme of needs, the model of human motivations developed by Abraham Maslow may prove useful. In his theory Maslow describes a set of hierarchically ordered needs, each of which must be satisfied in order to ascend to the level of needs immediately above it.[6] This theory became a famous cornerstone of humanistic psychology and has become widely accepted as a plausible rationalization of human motivations. What is not so well known, as Pavel Říčan points out, is the fact that shortly before Maslow died he had remade the hierarchy and at the top he added one more step – transcendence needs. This category refers to spirituality, namely the need to rely on the numinous and to transcend physical reality.[7] This final level helps elucidate the motive for the insatiable demand for

2 Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 167.

3 Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 62.

4 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 167.

5 Erich Fromm, *Mít, nebo být?* (Praha: Aurora, 2001), 158.

6 Abraham Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (Arkana: Penguin, 1993), 28–40.

7 Pavel Říčan, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality* [Psychology of religion and spirituality] (Praha: Portál, 2007), 231–235.

religious services and the willingness of individuals to pay for them. From the point of view of commodification, in hope of salvation the unprivileged give money to the Catholic Church as appropriate "exchange value" for securing God's goodwill. By paying for religious services rather than buying food, the poor neglect basic physiological needs and aim at the need which, according to Maslow, in human life assumes the highest significance. From a Christian viewpoint, hope itself refers to the prospect of ascending to heaven after death, it transcends the physical world. This transaction, however, can be seen as a vicious circle. In line with a standard Marxist criticism of religion, the lowly are promised to ascend to heaven as long as they remain obedient to the teachings of the Catholic Church with one of its demands being to pay in exchange for providing religious services. The Church does offer hope, but at a price.

In the story, the criticism of religion for exploiting the socially disadvantaged is one of the chief reasons for the lieutenant's passionate hatred of the Church and it fuels his determination to catch and execute the priest. When the fugitive is finally captured, he and his pursuer fall into a lengthy conversation in which the issues concerning materialism and the numinous are debated:

> *"No more money for saying prayers, no more money for building places to say prayers in. We'll give the people food instead, teach them to read, give them books. We'll see they don't suffer. (***)"*
> *"And what happens afterwards? I mean after everybody has got enough to eat and can read the right books – the books you let them read?"*
> *"Nothing. Death is a fact. We don't try to alter facts."*[8]

This can be interpreted in a further political and social context with regard to materialism and faith. Here, the ideological difference between the lieutenant and the priest can be illustrated by employing Maslow's remodelled hierarchy of human motivation. In fact, their differing ideological commitments can be mapped onto the extreme opposites of Maslow's model of needs. By stating: "We'll give the people food instead (***) We'll see they don't suffer,"[9] the lieutenant explicitly indicates that he aims at satisfying basic physiological needs, which are in Maslow's theory placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. Conversely, the priest refers to faith which is represented by the transcendence needs placed at the very top. Thus, the difference between mundane reality and fideism could not be any sharper. Whereas to the lieutenant "death is a fact," an absolute end of existence, the priest perceives it as the beginning of an afterlife, either in the form of damnation or salvation. In the lieutenant's viewpoint, death is the end of the physical body as well as the soul, whereas for the priest the soul and faith are immortal. From the view of the opposites represented by reason and faith, the priest's behaviour can be linked to Søren Kierkegaard's notion of faith. According to Kierkegaard, faith is an unexplainable paradox; faith thus begins precisely at the point at which rational reasoning leaves off.[10] The lieutenant's reasoning stops at the point of death, whereas for the priest, due to his faith, death is only the point of transcending the physical world towards eternity. Greene leads the reader to the point that spirituality is infinitely superior to physical reality. In support of this proposition, after the priest's execution an unexpected stranger arrives, also claiming: "I am a priest."[11] The recurrence suggests that it is impossible to

8 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 194.

9 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 194.

10 Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (London: Everyman Publishers, 1994), 44.

11 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 222.

destroy faith by resorting to large-scale violence. The need to transcend the mundane reality is irrepressible.

Besides the two characters who represent these conflicting ideologies, there is one more antagonist whose behaviour is strongly motivated by materialism and who functions as the embodiment of human greed; it is the character described as a "mestizo" or "half-caste". When the priest meets him for the first time, he immediately realizes that he presents a serious threat and will betray him for money. Indeed, in the mestizo's eyes the priest is an item to be commodified and the priest is aware of it: "He knew. He was in the presence of Judas."[12]

The real nature of the mestizo's perfidiousness is revealed when the cleric, though he knows that it is a deadly ambush, comes to a dying murderer to hear his deathbed confession. After the priest is taken captive, the mestizo comes to him and asks for his blessing, to which the priest responds with slight sarcasm: "What is the good? You can't sell a blessing."[13] The priest implies that the half-caste has betrayed him and instead of giving the blessing the priest urges him to give the money for the price on his head to the poor. However, the mestizo feigns offence by the priest's distrust: "'What money, father?' The half-caste shook his stirrup angrily. 'What money?'"[14] Here, it is of particular interest to perform a comparison between the priest, the lieutenant and the half-caste. Although the lieutenant's behaviour is primarily motivated by his philanthropic prospect of creating a better world, he perpetrates appalling atrocities against humanity. Similarly, the priest is an alcoholic who has fathered a child, neglected his vocational duty and as a Catholic cleric is responsible for participating in exploiting the lower classes. Even though their acts are to be found despicable, their behaviour, to a large extent, can be explained as the result of their ideological commitments. Nevertheless, the half-caste is the worst of them all, a spineless character driven merely by greed. In the novel he is ascribed the role of Judas, yet, he can be seen in a much worse light. As stated in the Book of Mathew:

> *When Judas the traitor saw that Jesus had been condemned, he was seized with remorse, and returned the thirty silver pieces to the chief priests and elders. 'I have sinned,' he said; 'I have brought an innocent man to his death.' But they said, 'What is it to us? See to that yourself.' So he threw the money down in the temple and left them, and went and hanged himself.*[15]

Judas repented of his acts and as a result of his remorseful conscience he committed suicide. On the contrary, the comparatively one-dimensional mestizo shows absolutely no signs of remorse, asking the priest for his blessing and even taking offence when reproached for his immoral behaviour. In conspicuous contrast with the lieutenant and the priest, the character of the mestizo functions as a third element whose immoral behaviour seems to imply that craven remorselessness in combination with human greed form the most violent ideologies.

As mentioned above, presumably the admonishment "What is the good? You can't sell a blessing"[16] is supposed to stir the traitor's conscience. However, by a paradox, to sell blessings used to be the means of earning the priest's living. In fact, the act of commodifying God for money taken from the poor is the main motive for the lieutenant's

12 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 91.

13 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 197.

14 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 197.

15 Matthew 27 in *The New English Bible*.

16 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 197.

passionate hatred of the Church and thus the cause of the priest's death. The self-recognition signified in the priest's utterance shows the change of life values that he has undergone. As the priest admits, his main reason for choosing the clerical vocation was the prospect of being "a rich and proud priest."[17] Still, towards the end of his life he seems to come to a need for transcendence which helps him to finally free himself from greed and materialism. Before taken captive, while he is leaving a village in which he has charged the people for baptisms, the cleric gives the money he has obtained to a local teacher who earlier reproached him for exploiting the poor:

> *"'Conscience money?' the schoolmaster said.*
> *'Yes.'*
> *'All the same, of course I thank you. It's good to see a priest with conscience. It's a stage in evolution.'"*[18]

Based on the priest's changed approach to materialism and faith, it might be concluded that his behaviour shows traces of moral and spiritual development. However, this proposition stands in a direct contradiction to Murray Roston's claim about the protagonist. Roston argues that the priest is a flat character; it is not the priest who changes but the reader's assessment of him.[19] To disprove Roston's assertion it is necessary to call attention to the fact that throughout the book the priest develops from a greedy egoist to a selfless Jesus-like martyr who sacrifices himself for others. The book's beginning and end follow very similar patterns. The priest is given a chance to escape from the communist state but instead goes to hear dying people's confessions. From this perspective, the behaviour of the character indeed remains the same. Nevertheless, the development comes in changes in the priest's attitude to materialism and, most importantly, his perception of God's mercy and his ultimate reliance on his inner faith. He becomes what Kierkegaard calls "a knight of faith" or as he is described in the novel after his execution: "One of the heroes of faith."[20] In Haim Gordon's words:

> *An unsung hero whose acts very partially resemble Kierkegaard's Abraham is the whiskey priest in The Power and the Glory, especially when he sacrifices his life to hear the confession of a murderer. The sacrifice may have been wrong from an ethical perspective, yet one can argue that it propels the whiskey priest into the sanctity of religious martyrism. Note, however, that the priest firmly believes that, in returning to hear the confession, he is doing what is right.*[21]

Even though he transgresses the Catholic dogma concerning voluntary death, he places his faith above the teaching of the Church and relies on God's mercy. Václav Umlauf explains that in Kierkegaard's philosophy faith is infinitely superior to ethics.[22] It can be concluded that what Greene seems to emphasize in relation to materialism, dogmatism and spirituality is that faith is immortal, religious dogmatism is to be viewed

17 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 67.

18 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 182.

19 Murray Roston, *Graham Greene's Narrative Strategies – A Study of the Major Novels* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmilan, 2006), 21.

20 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 219.

21 Haim Gordon, *Fighting Unsung Evil Heroes in the Novels of Graham Greene* (London: Greenewood Press, 1999), 90.

22 Václav Umlauf, *Kierkegaard – Hermeneutická interpretace* [Kierkegaard – Hermeneutic Interpretation] (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2005), 177.

only as a social, not spiritual descriptor, and materialism leading to greed is clearly immoral.

If the whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory* attains the status of a Messiah who sacrifices himself for others, a similar linkage drawn on the New Testament's narrative about the Christ could be made in relation to David, the child protagonist in "The Hint of an Explanation." Namely, it is the biblical story of Jesus being tempted by the devil in the desert. The plot of Greene's narrative revolves around an acolyte who is offered an electric toy train in exchange for one consecrated wafer taken during a communion service. Blacker, the antagonist representing evil forces, attempts to desecrate the holy item and uses fear and human irresistibility to material desires as the principal means of reaching his goal. To create a parallel between Jesus in the desert and David, it is of particular significance to highlight the fact that the evil forces in both stories use similar methods of addressing the material need in order to manipulate the protagonists. As stated in the Bible: The devil led him [Jesus] up and showed him in a flash all the kingdoms of the world. "All this dominion will I give to you,' he said, 'and the glory that goes with it; for it has been put in my hands and I can give it to anyone I choose."[23]

Although the stakes are widely different, Blacker's and the devil's methods are substantially identical. Instead of all the kingdoms Blacker offers an extremely valuable toy and, like the devil, he chooses to whom it will be given. Although the antagonist presents his interest in possessing the communion wafer as a desire to study the differences from the perspective of a baker, he also stresses the importance of the host being taken during the communion service: "I want to see what your God tastes like."[24] Here, it becomes apparent that the object of commodification is not the host itself but God, and the toy train represents appropriate exchange value attached to the worthiness of such trade.

The process of exchanging material items for abstract commodities seems to be the main force in work in the story. As a matter of fact, the first contact between the characters is established when the baker makes David accept a sweet cake: "I didn't want to take it, but he made me, and then I couldn't be other than polite when he asked me to come into his parlour behind the shop and see something very special."[25] That something very special turns out to be the toy train. Firstly, Blacker uses a cake to buy David's attention and then he shifts the focus from a piece of pie to the prospect of possessing a valuable toy: "'You ought to have it [the train] for your own, you ought,' but how skilfully and unemphatically he had sowed the longing, the idea of a possibility."[26] At this moment, when Blacker is assured of the child's desire to own the toy, he proposes to exchange the train for the consecrated Body of Christ and presents to be subject of his scientific scrutiny. Blacker gives David a host that he has made and bids him detect the dissimilarity:

> *"'Tell me,' he [Blacker] said, 'what's the difference?'*
> *'Difference?' I asked.*
> *'Isn't that just the same as you eat in church?'*

23 4 Luke 1-13 in *The New English Bible*.

24 Graham Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," in *Twenty-One Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), 41.

25 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 39.

26 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 40.

I said smugly, 'It hasn't been consecrated.'
He said, 'Do you think, if I put the two of them under a microscope, you could tell the difference?'"[27]

Blacker uses material objects and logical reasoning firstly to garner attention, then to arouse the child's desire to possess the valuable item and lastly, by dint of asking about the probability of finding any differences under microscope, he shifts the focus of significance from the holiness of the consecrated host to harmless scientific scrutiny. It is no surprise that in retrospect the narrator aptly describes Blacker's methods as: "An elaborate seduction."[28] Blacker stresses the importance of the host being consecrated and at the same time, in order to manipulate the child, he equates the host with the toy train: "I tell you what I'd do. I'd swap this electric train for one of your wafers – consecrated, mind. It's got to be consecrated."[29] To apply Marxist theory, Blacker attempts to commodify a material item for the numinous, yet he pretends the host to be just an ordinary piece of bakery.

From the point of view of Maslow's remade theory of human needs, David's refusal to accept the train as an exchange value for God might be interpreted as the protagonist's conscious awareness of the significance of spirituality, which is in Maslow's hierarchy represented by the transcendence needs placed at the very top. Interestingly, earlier in the story, when considering the seriousness of sacrilege, David compares murder as "trivial" in comparison to desecration: "Murder is sufficiently trivial to have its appropriate punishment, but for this act the mind boggled at the thought of any retribution at all."[30] In David's understanding, desecration is related to the spiritual domain, which belongs among the transcendence needs. Thus by accepting the train he would endanger the possibility of being redeemed. In Maslow's terminology, he would deprive himself of the chance to reach the top of the hierarchy of human needs which transcends mundane reality.

The same as the priest in *The Power and the Glory*, David is terrified at the prospect of behaving in breach of Catholic dogma, which would mean damnation. Grahame Jones points out that Greene himself was obsessed by the idea of damnation, an obsession which is reflected in his writings. In a common Gnostic perspective which Greene shared, the world is Satan's domain.[31] Based on *The Power and the Glory* and "The Hint of an Explanation" it might be concluded that Greene uses materialism in relation to evil and damnation to symbolize immorality and corruptibility. David and the priest both have to decide whether to succumb to materialist pleasures or to fulfil the transcendence needs. In other words, it is a conflict between the emphasis on mundane reality and Kierkegaard's concept of fideism. Eventually, David realizes the importance of transcendence, which helps him to defeat the evil. When Blacker comes to David's house to collect the host, the protagonist is already determined to overcome the evil:

""Give it me," he said. "Quick. You shall have the train in the morning."
I shook my head. He said, "I've got the bleeder here, and the key. You'd better toss it down."
"Go away," I said but I could hardly speak for fear.
"I'll bleed you first and then I'll have it just the same.""[32]

27 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 40.

28 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 39.

29 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 41.

30 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 44.

31 Grahame Jones, "Graham Greene and the Legend of Péguy," *Comparative Literature* (1969):139.

32 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 45.

Even though David faces a serious threat of death, he is determined to protect his newly discovered faith. He has made a Kierkegaardian leap and through his heroic resistance he has become "a knight of faith." As Neville Braybrooke asserts, in terms of eternity, Greene tries to resolve his characters' conflicts to show the importance of their complexity: "Pursuit becomes a way to salvation."[33] Like Jesus in the desert, owing to the pursuit in form of the unforgettable experience of resisting evil, David ascertains that inner spirituality is superior to materialism and consequently finds his faith. Due to the subjective experience, he makes a leap from ritual religious beliefs to genuine faith. In fact, the nature of David's spiritual experience is in full consonance with Tomáš Halík's proposition in which he compares religion to a house in which a person is born, whereas faith is a point in life that one has to mature into.[34] David was born in "a Catholic house;" however, he comes to faith only after making the mature decision.

The third piece of Greene's prose to be considered is *The Heart of the Matter*, a novel set in a Western African colony during the Second World War. The plot revolves around Major Scobie, a middle-aged police officer and a Catholic convert. Scobie and his wife Louise live in a childless marriage in which their Catholic faith seems to be the main bond. Louise is not accepted by the colonial middle-class community and wants to leave for South Africa. In order to gratify Louise's desire, Scobie borrows money for her trip from Yusef, a Muslim merchant suspected of smuggling and black-marketing. Shortly after Louise leaves, Scobie meets a young widow Helen with whom he begins an adulterous liaison. At this point, Scobies's Catholic conscience begins to collide with his altruistic motives. That is, Scobie is unable to remain emotionally distant; he is not corruptible by material valuables but by his altruism: "They [other officers] had been corrupted by money, and he [Scobie] had been corrupted by sentiment. Sentiment was the more dangerous, because you couldn't name its price."[35] In fact, Scobie's deep feeling towards his wife eventually results in his suicide.

In relation to materialism and faith it is of particular interest to call attention to Scobie's order of life priorities. Even though he remains indifferent to the desire for material valuables, he endeavours to secure his wife's happiness by dint of taking a loan. As mentioned above, to make his wife happy is one of his main objectives. Since Louise hates the colony, she wants to leave for South Africa. Thus, Scobie asks Yusef for a loan in order to fulfil her wish and pays for the expensive journey. It is of great significance to highlight the fact that Scobie ascribes the transaction to God's will: "I've prayed for peace and now I am getting it. It's terrible the way prayer is answered. It had better to be good, I've paid a high enough price for it."[36] Here, Scobie commodifies Louise's happiness for "a high enough price" in the form of borrowed money, yet he forces himself believe that it is God's intention. In Scobie's understanding, his wife's wellbeing is conditioned by providing her with financial security. Therefore, when he decides to commit suicide, he wants to make it appear to have been an accident to guarantee the payoff to his spouse: "Insurance companies never like sleeping draughts, and no coroner could lend himself to a deliberate fraud."[37] Scobie intends to commodify his death for Louise's material security and happiness.

33 Neville Braybrooke, "Graham Greene: A Pioneer Novelist," *The English Journal* (1950): 418.

34 Tomáš Halík, *Co je bez chvění, není pevné – labyrintem světa s vírou a pochybností* [What is not trembling is not steady – the labyrinth of a world in faith and doubt] (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 2002), 127.

35 Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 55.

36 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 100.

37 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 211.

Another reason for making his suicide appear like an accident is the fact that Scobie and Louise are Catholics and he does not want her to find out about his voluntary damnation. In an inner monologue addressed to God Scobie explains the origins of his troubled conscience and reasons for his intended suicide:

> *"O God, I am the only guilty one because I've known the answers all the time. I've preferred to give you pain rather than give pain to Helen or my wife because I can't observe your suffering. I can only imagine it. But there are limits to what I can do to you – or them. I can't desert either of them while I'm alive, but I can remove myself from their bloodstream."*[38]

Scobie is forced to decide between hurting his beloved and disappointing God. Eventually, he opts for the latter. Similarly to the priest in *The Power and the Glory*, as a consequence of behaving against the Catholic dogma, Scobie has internalized a sense of guilt to such an extent that he begins to be convinced of his everlasting damnation: "I believe that I'm damned for all eternity – unless a miracle happens."[39] By this Scobie seems to suggest that God's mercy is his only hope to avoid damnation. Interestingly, Scobie, and the priest know that they are, according to the Catholic dogma, damned, yet they still cling to the hope in God's mercy. As Jones observes, in relation to damnation Greene's characters rely on hope when reason tells them that all is lost.[40] Here, reason might be interpreted as a logical conclusion derived from the teaching of Catholicism, whereas hope is God's mercy.

To illustrate it on Scobie's case, he lives in a mortal sin, does not repent it and eventually commits suicide, which, according to the Catholic teaching, leads to eternal damnation. Therefore, reason tells him that he is damned. However, he still places his faith in God and fosters hope in His divine mercy. Elliot Malamet asserts that Scobie's suicide is the result of his assimilated Catholic theology which he perceives as "a police system."[41] In the above cited quotation Scobie utters: "O God, I am the only guilty one because I've known the answers all the time"[42] by which he implies that Catholic dogmatism functions as a system of regulatory laws according to which relevant punishments are to be expected. However, even though Scobie is a policeman, he subconsciously questions the system of blind obedience to dogmatism. When Scobie and Louise are told that one of the young police officers has committed suicide, Louise condemns it as an act of voluntary damnation, to which Scobie replies: "We'd forgive most things if we knew the facts. (***) A policeman should be the most forgiving person if he gets the facts right." [43] Here in the figure of "a policeman" Scobie seems to be referring to God. He suggests that only God has the right to make judgements and what according to the Catholic dogma might appear to be a sinful act leading to damnation does not have to necessarily be in breach of an individual's concept of morally correct behaviour. David Daiches comments on this dichotomy:

> *Graham Greene [...] in his more serious novels explores the disparities between human decency and theological virtue, between moral intention and irreligious act, so as to shatter the complacency of*

38 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 289.

39 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 259.

40 Jones, "Graham Greene and the Legend of Péguy," 145.

41 Elliott Malamet, "Penning the Police/Policing the Pen: The Case of Graham Greene's The Heart of the Matter," *Twentieth Century Literature* 39.3 (1993): 301.

42 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 289.

43 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 79.

those religious readers who had always thought that good intentions on the humanist level were somehow related to divinely approved human behaviour.[44]

Along with Daiches, it is worth drawing attention to the last dialogue between Father Rank, a colonial priest, and Louise in which she states her low opinion about the religiousness of her deceased husband: "He was a bad Catholic"[45] to which Father Rank resolutely opposes: "That's the silliest phrase in common use."[46] Father Rank shatters Louise's complacency about her view that whether a person is a good or bad Christian is to be judged on the basis of one's obedience to religious dogmatism. This opinion fully accords with Robert Wichert's proposition in which he claims that in his fiction Greene suggests that being a Christian does not mean that one is absolutely sinless.[47] Indeed, what Greene does seem to propose is that faith in God and His mercy is superior to obedience to any form of religious dogmatism. When Louise suggests that due to his suicide Scobie is not worth praying for, Father Rank vigorously responds:

[Father Rank] "For goodness sake, Mrs. Scobie, don't imagine you – or I – know a thing about God's mercy."
[Louise] "The Church says..."
[Father Rank] "I know what the Church says. The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart."[48]

This snatch of conversation might be interpreted as Greene's attempt to call attention to the conflict between dogmatism and spirituality. Whereas Louise's reason tells her that the only means of securing salvation is unquestioning conformity to the teaching of Catholicism, Father Rank suggests that what really matters is personal faith. In other words, Greene appears to accentuate that dogma is the product of human reasoning related to mundane world only, whereas faith is about the personal non-communicable experience with God.

Whether Scobie and the priest are damned or redeemed is in fact of no importance. Any attempt to reach a valid conclusion would have to involve reasoned interpretations in line with some kind of theological beliefs which would likely lead to explanations based on some form of religious dogmatism; and that is precisely what Greene in his writing seems to attack. Scobie and the priest place their faith above the religious doctrine by which they seem to protest against the teaching of Catholicism. Indeed, based on the analysis of the two characters' approach to dogma, it might be concluded that their concept of religiousness appears to be Protestant rather than Catholic. In line with the Catholic system of beliefs, they consider themselves damned on the basis of not repenting having committed mortal sins, yet they still rely on God's mercy. To draw a parallel between their behaviour and Protestantism, Daphne Hampson points out that in Martin Luther's understanding of redemption, no sin can damn a Christian who upholds genuine faith in God. Salvation is not to be earned by docility to religious doctrine but it is a manifestation of God's grace earned through faith.[49]

44 David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1960), 1172.

45 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 305.

46 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 305.

47 Robert Wichert, "The Quality of Graham Greene's Mercy," *College English* (1963): 102.

48 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 306.

49 Daphne Hampson, *Christian Contradictions – The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 90-92.

Obviously, this standpoint stands in a sharp contradiction to Greene's perception of Catholicism, which the author perceives as a system of laws to be followed. To provide an example, shortly before committing suicide Scobie says: "The problem is, he thought, we know all the answers – we Catholics are damned by our knowledge. There is no need to work anything out."[50] This might be construed as Greene's critical attitude towards approaching religiousness as a "police system" based on fear.

Another criticism of dogmatism appears later in *The Power and the Glory* when the whisky priest is provided with a shelter by Mr Lehr and his sister, German Protestants who immigrated to Mexico, and he finds a copy of the Bible with explanatory notes:

> *The priest read with some astonishment:*
> *If you are in trouble read Psalm 34.*
> *If trade is poor Psalm 37.*
> *If very prosperous I Corinthians, x, 2.*[51]

The priest expresses his wide-eyed amazement at the fact that ordinary people should be taught to interpret the Bible themselves. This is consequently affirmed by Mr Lehr's reproachful utterance: "You wouldn't understand that, father. You don't like people to read the Bible."[52] To decipher the meaning of Mr Lehr's criticism, it is necessary to refer to the origins of Protestantism. As Hampson observes, one of the animadversions that Martin Luther held against the politics of the Catholic Church was its strategic refusal of making the Bible accessible to all. It was written in Latin; therefore, it needed to be interpreted, which gave the Church almost ultimate power to manipulate the masses by employing fear of damnation.[53] Here, Greene exalts Protestantism not only by explicit criticism of the centuries-long Catholic tradition in claiming the right to interpret the scripture, but also by endowing the character of Mr Lehr with features that strongly resemble Martin Luther. Like Luther, Mr Lehr is of German origin and also openly critiques Catholicism and its practices, which he perceives as erroneous. In addition, concerning Mr Lehr's name in connection to the protest against Catholicism, it is worth pointing out that the surname has an identical stem with the German word *lehren*, to teach, as if to suggest that the cognitive and spiritual development of human beings should not be obstructed by depriving people of opportunities to learn and to think for themselves.

Concerning materialism and spirituality, figuration in the works also demonstrates the characters' refusal of Catholic dogmatism. As Lawrence Cunningham observes, Catholicism places a strong emphasis on holy objects as visible and tangible signs of God in relation to the Catholic orthodoxy.[54] Therefore, when Scobie and the priest begin to show signs of a troubled conscience as the result of the conflict between their inner faith and the Catholic doctrine, they both lose or in some way damage objects of Catholic idolatry. The priest "gets rid of his chalice"[55] and Scobie discovers that "his rosary is broken."[56] This might be viewed as an attempt to separate their inner faith from

50 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 242.

51 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 165.

52 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 165.

53 Hampson, *Christian Contradictions*, 67.

54 Lawrence Cunningham, *Introduction to Catholicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10.

55 Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, 71.

56 Greene, *The Heart of the Matter*, 200.

the teaching of Catholicism. In fact, this proposition explains the reason why David is the only one of the characters who survives and even benefits from the Catholic orthodoxy. By swallowing the host: "I couldn't separate the Host from the paper, so I swallowed both,"[57] David makes a "leap of faith" and accepts Jesus as his saviour. David swallows the host as an act of uniting his faith with Catholicism. "The Hint of an Explanation" is the only writing analyzed here in which Catholicism receives positive recognition. Still, it is imperative to point out that, in contrast with the two novels, in the short story, contrary to the two novels, Catholicism does not function as the negative element, as it is the character of Blacker who represents evil.

Nevertheless, "The Hint of an Explanation" seems an exception to the theme of protest against Catholic dogmatism that is apparent in Greene's prose. Wilhelm Horton asserts that by attacking the Catholic doctrine Greene suggests that the Catholic Church is limited in its understanding of human failure. Therefore, its dogma should not be taken so seriously; God has more mercy than does the Catholic Church.[58]

In fact, this unorthodox approach to Catholic orthodoxy fully accords with a motto widely used to describe the early 20th century standpoint towards religiousness: "I am not religious, I am spiritual."[59] Indeed, to be spiritual rather than religious seems to be the precise description of Greene and his characters. It might be generalized that in Greene's writings the issue over dogmatism and spirituality is represented by the conflict between reasoned obedience to religious orthodoxy and the emphasis on personal faith. In his prose Greene often highlights the predilection of the Catholic Church towards materialism which, in Greene's view, seems to divert the very essence of faith from spiritualism to ritualism. As exemplified by the mestizo in *The Power and the Glory* and Blacker in "The Hint of an Explanation," Greene also implies that materialism is not only immoral, but it is one of the most dangerous life philosophies.

In conclusion, in his fiction Greene suggests that dogmatic obedience depends on the strength of one's will, yet it most certainly does not reveal the real nature of a sustained faith. In fact, in Greene's prose servility to dogmatism functions as the element against which faith is juxtaposed. By endowing his characters with the qualities of "the knight of faith" Greene appears to imply that faith is superior to materialism, ethics and, above all, any form of logical reasoning.

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57 Greene, "The Hint of an Explanation," 45.

58 Wilhelm Hortmann, "Graham Greene: The Burnt-Out Catholic," *Twentieth Century Literature* 10.2 (1964): 67–73.

59 Říčan, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, 50–51.

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