

The heart of glory:  
children, humanism,  
and character in  
greene's novel



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In Graham Greene's dynamic novel *The Power and the Glory*, we follow the Whiskey Priest throughout his harrowing journey as he runs for his life, avoiding capture and death at the hands of the Lieutenant. This novel shows the development of the priest as he turns from a previously selfish man before meeting his daughter, into a man who gives everything including himself to trying to help children after meeting Brigetta. Greene shows the diversity and parallels between the Lieutenant and the Whiskey Priest as they both struggle with theological beliefs while embarking on their journey of making a better world for children, both handling it in extremely contrasting ways. We follow the Priest while on the run from persecution in Mexico; from watching him meet his love child to helping a woman carry her dead son along a dangerous path to a church. The Lieutenant and the Whiskey Priest dance around each other from place to place but the Priest is finally caught when he steps back into a dangerous territory to deliver the last rights to a murderer. A major distinction that grows larger throughout the progression of the novel is how the Whiskey Priest changes drastically throughout the novel and is a person who has immense influence, even after death. Both the Lieutenant and the Whiskey Priest care greatly for the children; however, the Whiskey Priest's Christianity influences more people than the lieutenant's humanism. Throughout the novel, both the Whiskey Priest and Lieutenant love children and are willing to devote their existence to the children's future.

While on the run from the Lieutenant the Whiskey Priest travels to a village where he meets his illegitimate daughter Brigetta. The Whiskey Priest knows it's a sin but he can't repent for having his daughter whom he loves but feels

condemned by Christianity, " He said, I don't know how to repent." That was true: he had lost faculty. He couldn't say to himself that he wished his sin had never existed, because the sin seemed to him now so unimportant and he loved the fruit of it" (Greene 152). From that point on the " bad" priest evolves rapidly from a man who reluctantly returns to hear a confession to a man who walks into certain death to hear the confession of a murderer. In contrast to the Whiskey Priest, the Lieutenant does everything for the children from the beginning, but does it for all children. His need to create a better world for children steams from his own childhood which " seemed to him like a weakness: this was his own land, he would have walled it in if he could with steel until he had eradicated from it everything which reminded him of how it had once appeared to a miserable child. He wanted to destroy everything: to be alone without any memories at all" (49). In an attempt to make the world a better place the Lieutenant attempts to rid Mexico of the corrupt evil that is associated with the deceitful ' fairy tales' the Church has weaved. By killing priests and religious figures the Lieutenant found a purpose but more importantly " he had [found a way to try to] give the children a bright material future and his lonely failure is endorsed" (Sharrok109). Each man devotes his life to children but both go about it in drastically opposing ways. The Whiskey Priest focuses his love on a single child, Brigetta, while the Lieutenant focuses on all children.

Continually, due to the Lieutenant's humanist beliefs he tries his best to care for children but rejects the church. The Lieutenant's actions are motivated by his humanism views. He believes that all of the children will be better off without the corrupt Catholic Church. His views become perfectly clear when

he questions the Whiskey Priest about how he could possibly support a Church that disregards the ones who are actually in need of help but instead “ supports the rich and ignor[es] their brutal oppression and continual plundering of the poor [and] blames the Whiskey Priest for deceiving the poor about the evident reasons for their suffering” (Gordon 50). The Lieutenant fights in order to care for the physical needs of the children, which correlates to his atheist belief that only accepts the physical world. He becomes increasingly frustrated however, because he can't comprehend how people can have faith in a God that he doesn't believe could exist as there is only vacantness as a result of evolution from animals (Greene 48). Thus, the Lieutenant believes he is purging the citizens and making way for a better future as he tries to “ eliminate from their childhood everything which had made him miserable, all that was poor, superstitious, and corrupt. They deserved nothing less than the truth” (58). The Lieutenant does everything in order to deconstruct the Catholic Church as he sees them as the source of everything that could harm the children and their innocence.

In contrast to the Lieutenants humanism, the corrupt Whiskey Priest has strong Christian beliefs. Due to his theological beliefs he attempts to care for the children in a spiritual and moral way while fighting for eternal goodness for each child. In a contrast to stereotypes, the Priest feels he is “ even less worthy in the sight of God” (Leah 19) yet still continues to minister to people throughout his personal struggle and his physical journey through spiritual, moral and mental support. Continually, the Whiskey Priest is motivated by his Christian beliefs even if he is corrupt he still believes that God is good and that He is incorruptible which he specifies “ in his conversation with the

Lieutenant after his arrest, [he] affirms his faith. ' God is love. I don't say the heart doesn't feel a taste of it, but what a taste. The smallest glass of love mixed with a pint pot of ditch-water. We wouldn't recognize that love... it would be enough to scare us—God's love. It set to a bush in the desert, didn't it, and smashed open graves...'” (21). Regardless of his personal sin and struggles, the Whiskey Priest still holds strong in his faith and is unfaltering which assists him in difficult decisions to come as he finds the love for his daughter, and a new flame is enlightened within him. Even when the Whiskey Priest was half-starved, assaulted by fever and the police carried him, he still carried out God's will. Even from within the thick walls of a jail cell, the Whiskey Priest still finds God's light and spreads it to everyone who needs it and even admits to being a Priest so that he can minister to those who desperately need a priest (Greene 123-134). Even though the Priest does not see it, he is a self-less and Godly man yet believes he is not a good priest; however, he still ministers to those in need while he demonstrates that “ Christ is intimately linked with every sinner” (Bosco 50) and does what he can to foster the children's spiritual and mental needs as opposed to their physical needs

Moreover, while the Lieutenant believes that the measures he takes through humanism make a large-positive impact, he actually ends up harming them physically and mentally. The Lieutenant does everything for the people but they still fear him and do not respect him as a person or what he stands for but rather makes people follow him through fear. This is because he harbours deeply rooted hatred for Christianity and is not hesitant about taking hostages to kill from the villages he claims to protect as “ his brutality

and persistence in wishing to kill the fleeing Whiskey Priest is leading him astray, away from the people whom he wants to assist, away from the poverty stricken Mexicans to whom he wishes to restore their stolen property and integrity" (Gordon 50). Regardless, the Lieutenant believes all his efforts will pay off because it is for the benefit of the people he cares about; however, " When the boy Luis who had hero-worshipped him spits on his polished boot" (Sharrok 109) it becomes clear that the Lieutenant is not as influential as he believed. The Lieutenant didn't see the harm in what he was doing as his views blocked the reality from his consciousness, " A man like that... does no real harm. A few dead men. We all have to die" (Greene 34). The Lieutenants one-track-mind is a hindrance to seeing how scared the people are but also distracts from how he is attempting to do everything for the people but is actually making them, and himself suffer which he demonstrates after 'winning' as " he [goes] into the office. The pictures of the priest and the gunman were still pinned up on the wall: he tore them down- they would never be wanted again" (207). Once the two men are gone, the Lieutenant no longer knows what to do since he thought purging would assist the future of Mexico's children but in reality he has murdered countless people, many of whom are innocent which created a state of fear for the children. The Lieutenant devotes his entire life to trying to make Mexico a better place for the children but has little positive impact and ends up emphasizing what he tried to drive out.

Although the Whiskey Priest believes he and his Christianity beliefs make no impact on the people, he actually influences the children for the better. His life and even in his death are caused by his sense of duty. The Whiskey

Priest could have stayed across the mountains in safety, but he chose instead to administer Last Rites to the dying outlaw, who murdered countless. Even though he sensed that he would be wasting his time and that the message summoning him was almost assuredly a police trick, he still went (Greene 188-90). The Whiskey Priest does all in his ability to do God's will, even though his spiritual situation is unnecessarily complicated by issues that targeted priests such as himself; however, through this "daily acquaintance with acute suffering and death that allows him to save his own soul and to dispense aid and comfort to the souls of others" (Bosco 50). Both before and after his death the Whiskey Priest influences many for good. After meeting with the Whiskey Priest Mr. Tench "[has] an odd impulse [come] to him to project this stray letter towards the last address he had [for his wife] ... he tried to begin... he started to write" (Greene 45-46). Similarly, during the Whiskey Priest's brief interaction with young, ex-Christian Coral, "'has turned her mind back to God in time' -i. e., in time to earn her eternal salvation—for 'the sesame' to the future, as the Priest's dream suggests" (Baldrige 63). The Whiskey Priest does not seek power nor glory but still has a large effect on the children including Louis. When Louis is introduced he does not care about the stories his mother attempts to tell him but after the Whiskey Priest, he "begins to see the pious tale of the martyr Juan read to him by his mother in a new light: he is a convert from the Lieutenants party to the Church" (Sharrock 118). Even through his death, he made a way for a new Priest and consequently Christianity, as the boy opens the door wide for the new Priest after watching the Whiskey Priest's execution. In contrast to the Lieutenant, the Whiskey Priest does not try to be influential towards the children but is actually the most influential character in the

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novel. Throughout the novel the Power and the Glory, the Lieutenant and the Whiskey Priest are intertwined and connected through their journey, beliefs, and love for the children. The Lieutenant attempts to care for the children's physical needs as he is motivated by his hate for the Church and his humanism beliefs. By contrast, the Whiskey Priest is motivated by his Christianity and his desire to love and nurture souls and thus cares for the spiritual aspects. Throughout the novel, the Lieutenant makes it clear through his actions and words that he desires to have a positive influence over the children and to make the world a better place solely for them. However, his actions have the opposite effect and the Lieutenant remains an un influential character who negatively effects Mexico.

Despite the Whiskey Priest being a ' bad' priest, he is actually one of the most positive and influential people in the novel. He is able to minister to the broken and lost souls since he himself is a broken and lost soul. The Whiskey Priest is a self-less, courageous man who is too hard on himself and does not recognize the good he has fostered in Coral, Louis, Mr. Tench, and countless other citizens thus paving the way for Christianity to begin to flourish once more. Both the Lieutenant and the Whiskey Priest care greatly for the children; however, the Whiskey Priest's Christianity influences more people than the lieutenant's humanism.

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