

# Communism and religion in gabriel garcia marquez's chronicle of a death foretold ...

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In the twentieth century, South Americans faced a dilemma: to succumb to the capitalist ideals of the western world or to surrender to the communist beliefs of Marx and Engels. Through symbol-laden texts, writers communicated their beliefs concerning the two economic ideologies. In his acclaimed novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Gabriel García Márquez vindicates Marxist ideals through his portrayal of the Catholic Church as a manipulative hegemon that cripples its people. These townsfolk become drones because of the local bishop's stranglehold on his followers. By portraying the townspeople as desensitized drones, Márquez characterizes the town as the novel's most corrupt regime through the inevitable death of his protagonist, Santiago Nasar.

In defense of his socialist beliefs and Marxist ideals, Gabriel García Márquez creates a capitalist villain in the town's bishop to illustrate the unjust hegemonic nature of the Catholic Church with respect to its treatment of the townspeople. Márquez posits the idea that although it had humble beginnings during the time of Christ, the Church has grown to be the most influential force in history, accruing monetary aid from its worldwide followers. Márquez strongly criticizes the Church's affluence and its resemblance to a hierarchical corporation, characterized by a few dominant figureheads and masses of bottom feeders. The first and most obvious condemnation of the Catholic Church occurs with the arrival of the bishop. Santiago Nasar's mother, Placida Linero, is the moral compass of the novel and serves as a vessel to relay the views of Gabriel García Márquez. She symbolizes integrity and traditional morals and "show[s] no sign of interest" in the bishop's arrival, claiming he will "give an obligatory blessing,

as always, and go back the way he came” because he detests the town (8 Marquez).

Through the trustworthy Placida Linero, Marquez presents his anti-Church sentiments, the mindset critical of the Church and its treatment of the townspeople. Placida Linero suggests that the bishop’s “ obligatory blessing” is nothing more than a formality, a ritual which loosely and superficially binds the upper echelon of the Catholic Church to the impoverished townspeople. She explains how the bishop “ go[es] back the way he came,” highlighting his isolation from the townspeople and his position as a foreigner. Marquez illustrates the insensitivity of capitalism and its ability to leave even the most religious people devoid of conviction. Although Placida Linero portrays the bishop as distant and insensitive, “ Church pomp” nevertheless fascinates Santiago Nasar, who claims it is “ like the movies” (8 Marquez). Through Santiago, Marquez first illustrates the town’s “ fascination” with the Church, categorizing it as an addiction.

Marquez deepens his disapproval by utilizing “ pomp” in his description of the bishop, accentuating the Church’s flamboyant nature. Considering that in Church language, pomp is defined as “ a worldly display” or “ a vain show” (Harper), Marquez uses strong irony through diction to further his disapproval of the bishop. He utilizes this powerful word just as the Catholic Church does: as a depreciatory term that looks down upon those who flaunt their possessions. Marquez chooses a word that the Catholic Church itself uses to criticize those who are materialistic and uber-capitalist to illustrate the Church’s hypocrisy and dominance over its followers.

“ Placida Linero was right: the bishop [does not] get off his boat” (Marquez 16). Marquez uses the bishop’s short-lived visit to condemn the Church, specifically concerning its relations with the townspeople. “ Everywhere one could see the crates of well-flattened roosters [the townspeople] were bearing as a gift for the bishop... At the pier, there was so much firewood piled up that it would have taken at least two hours to load” (Marquez 16). The town prepares for the bishop’s visit extensively, and collects many of its finest goods as tribute to the spiritual leader. They devote a great deal of their time and resources to receive him welcomingly. Instead of splitting the accrued firewood and food among themselves as a commune, the town must devote all of their time and effort to a foreigner who represents a capitalist ideology, supporting the economic domination of a select few over an unprivileged majority. The author then juxtaposes this dedication with the bishop’s unappreciative, pretentious attitude and exceptionally affluent appearance.

The bishop wears a “ white cassock” surrounds himself with a “ retinue of Spaniards” as his boat “ soak[s] those who were closest to the edge” of the shore (Marquez 17). The author portrays the bishop as a wealthy ruler with the townspeople as his slaves. Marquez also places him on a higher plateau physically, looking down upon the town, even soaking them with his colossal boat. Instead of surrounding himself with those who truly follow Catholicism and its teachings, the bishop is accompanied by light-skinned aristocrats who abuse their lofty positions in society’s racial and economic hierarchies. Marquez’s depicts the bishop as unappreciative, distant from his people, and

dominant over his followers. Through this representation, Marquez effectually characterizes the Church as a controlling, deceiving hegemon-ironically omnipotent and omnipresent.

Although Marquez adamantly condemns the Church, he stretches the criticism to the townspeople because of their drone-like manner and inability to preempt Santiago Nasar's death. Just as Santiago, who is not the most oblivious character, is absorbed into the frenzy surrounding the bishop, the rest of the town is just as wide-eyed. Santiago's inability to resist the urge to pay tribute to the bishop accentuates the town's submission to the Church because Marquez portrays Santiago as a revered character in the eyes of the reader. By illustrating how people not only follow their religious leader but are stuck in a pseudo-daze, Marquez characterizes the town as drones who have been desensitized and who lack the compassion and sentiment that, in Marquez's opinion, are brought out through Marxist ideals. Although socialism and communism can be synonymous with the stripping of individuality and clumping of people into masses, through Marquez's Marxist lens, the reader can discern between the dispassion brought upon by suffering underneath capitalism and the unity of the Marxist mindset.

Marquez highlights the negative affect of the church on the townspeople with regard to compassion for one another and unity amongst themselves. Because the Church puts its own best interests before those of its congregation, this mindset is instilled in the people, where everyone looks out for their own benefit and their own material possessions. The glamour and grandeur of the bishop's possessions almost entrance the town

members, incarcerating them by the harbor and erasing the endangered life of Santiago Nasar from their minds. The bishop distracts even the most powerful townspeople, Colonel Lazaro Aponte from preventing the seemingly inevitable. After being informed of the Vicario brothers' intentions, " he [gets] dressed calmly, [ties] his bow tie several times until he [has] it perfect, and around his neck he [hangs] the scapular of the Congregation of Mary, to receive the bishop" (Marquez 55). As mayor, Aponte has an obligation to stop the Vicario twins from killing a citizen of his town, but he instead determines to show the bishop the respect he so deserves.

Aponte ties his bow tie repeatedly, preoccupied with the perfection of his appearance rather than the life of Santiago Nasar, just as the bishop makes sure he appears grand in front of his followers. The mayor also remembers to wear " the scapular of the Congregation of Mary," which represents of his dedication and respect for the bishop, yet through the Marxist lens, it portrays Aponte as a drone, a slave of the capitalist Church. The mayor swears his loyalty to the wrong congregation: he wears the scapular of the bishop and disregards his own people. Still, the townspeople share the same faults. Marquez illustrates that they lack the unity of Marxism and instead look out for their own.

Each member of the community, from Victoria Guzman to the Vicario brothers' fellow butchers, is a drone, unable to put their own needs and benefits aside to save the life of a fellow townspeople. Because the town is incapable of escaping the message of the corrupted church, they have become this unstoppable hegemon and have effectually sacrificed Santiago

Nasar; Marquez illustrates their inability to unite and have this compassion and urgency because of the capitalist mindset instilled in them through the bishop's message.

The death of Santiago Nasar is more than just a mystery murder. It represents a society decaying from the inside out because of the stranglehold imposed upon them by the Church. Marquez successfully portrays the Catholic Church as a corrupted hegemon through the bishop who enforces his message on the townspeople. This message cripples each one of them yet effectually empowers them with authority exhibited the morning of Santiago Nasar's death. It is unclear who is truly to blame for his death, yet Marquez convinces the reader, through his Marxist lens, it was the town's unstoppable hegemony that made this death regrettably inevitable.

#### Works Cited

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