

Spiritual sovereignty: crusoe's religious and colonialist journey



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While Robinson Crusoe is undoubtedly a story of survival, it is first and foremost a story of religious and spiritual growth. Crusoe's spiritual journey affects every single aspect of his life and draws him to reconsider many of his close-held beliefs, like his right to sovereignty over the island on which he is stranded. Interestingly enough, his core belief about sovereignty does not change at the surface level. At the beginning of his journey, when he first arrives at the island, he believes it belongs to him, and takes pleasure in that. Toward the end of his time at the island, he still feels the same way, but his justifications for that belief have changed due to his changed beliefs in religion. Throughout the entire novel, Crusoe believes he has sovereignty over the island and its inhabitants, but his new-found religious beliefs allow him to justify that sovereignty through an idea of divine obligation.

Upon arriving at the island, Crusoe quickly develops an idea of his sovereignty over the land. This concept is immediately met with comparisons to the way in which English lords preside over their own land, as seen in the quote: " I might have it in inheritance, as completely as any lord of a manor in England" (80). It is also important to note that Crusoe does not consider the fact that he could rule over other people on this island; his sole concern is with possession of the land itself and the resources it provides.

The tone of the passage is also important in analyzing Crusoe's feelings towards sovereignty at the beginning of his time on the island. While he has certainly decided that the island is in his possession ("...to think that this was all my own, that I was king and lord of all this country indefeasibly, and had a right of possession" (80)), he is apprehensive about truly embracing these thoughts. This is conveyed through careful choice of words— for example, he

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surveys the island “ with a secret kind of pleasure” (80). The word secret implies that he is not fully comfortable with claiming the entire island as his own, and feels that he must keep this idea to himself (even though he does not have anyone else on the island with which to share this idea at the time). Crusoe also states that this pleasure is “ mixt with my other afflicting thoughts” (80), conveying that he has other thoughts which conflict with the concept of full sovereignty over the island, therefore creating an internal debate around the subject.

While not directly stated, Crusoe does eventually come to a conclusion in this internal conflict, a direct result of his religious journey throughout his time on the island. First of all, Crusoe becomes obviously much more comfortable with his self-imposed sovereignty. For example, thinking about his sovereignty is now labelled as a “ merry reflection” (190) instead of a “ secret pleasure” (80). This directly implies that Crusoe no longer feels conflicted about this idea—he no longer believes this is an idea he can only enjoy in secret. Now, he has an “ undoubted right of dominion” (190), while before, his right of dominion was met with “ afflicting thoughts” (80).

There are obvious changes to Crusoe's situation at this point in the novel. First and foremost, he is no longer alone. Friday is present as his subject and friend, along with his father and the Spaniard. Crusoe has no qualms about exerting full rule over them, and does not doubt their dedication to him: “ they all ow'd their lives to me, and were ready to lay down their lives, if there had been occasion of it, for me” (190).

He is so confident in his rule over these people largely because of his newfound religious beliefs. For example, Crusoe is very proud of the fact that he converted Friday to Christianity, and it is established earlier that he believes that it was his divine obligation to do so: "I had not only been mov'd myself to look up to Heaven, and to seek the hand that had brought me there; but was now to be made an instrument under Providence to save the life, and for ought I knew, the soul of a poor savage, and bring him to the true knowledge of religion, and of the Christian doctrine, that he might know Christ Jesus, to know whom is life eternal" (174). Therefore, Crusoe has finally found a justification for his absolute sovereignty over the island and its people, and that is his religion.

Crusoe is very obviously fixated on the religious beliefs of his so-called subjects, though he does not attempt to convert anyone besides Friday: "My man Friday was a Protestant, his father was a pagan and a cannibal, and the Spaniard was a Papist: However, I allow'd liberty of conscience throughout my dominions" (190). He obviously does not hold the same standards to anyone besides Friday or hold them in the same regard, but still allows them their respective religious freedom. In all of his new justifications for his sovereignty over the island, religion is the most important element. Crusoe's journey is one of adventure and survival, but also one of religious and spiritual discovery. He has been raised his entire life with the English notion of colonialism and sovereignty over other lands, so it is obvious that he would immediately believe in his own rule over this island, but he lacked the true justification for this belief. So, at the surface level, Crusoe's beliefs about sovereignty do not change—it is his justification for the belief that

changes. Crusoe finds religion through Christianity and through his language, expresses that it is his divine obligation to rule over Friday, and by that measure, the island. Crusoe's ideas about rule and sovereignty do not change, but his spiritual journey and finding of faith allow his ideas to transform.