

The Use of Christian Humanism in Callaghan's *The Loved and the Lost*

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Abstract. The paper aims to elaborate Morley Callaghan's use of Christian humanism in his fiction creation, which is generally known as Callaghanese fiction. Influenced by Jacques Maritain's moral and political philosophy, Callaghan expresses his moral theme through "Integral Christian Humanism", a definition given by Jacques Maritain in one of his earliest political works. In the paper, his novel *The Loved and the Lost* is employed to exemplify his expression of Christian humanism through the analysis of human nature, the pursuit of human freedom and their moral and spiritual perfection of protagonists in fiction. Looking forward to social change and innovation against disorder, Callaghan always sets his story against an urban background to demonstrate his urban realism, and *The Loved and the Lost* is not an exception. Peggy Sanderson, the protagonist of the story, finds the contradiction between her set of value and the society. She choose to struggle with the sin but eternally redeemed, which the dignity of humanity is rooted in the incarnation this makes Callaghan believe that human beings have free will to sin but also the responsibility to seek public grace and forgiveness.

1. An Introduction to the author and his Christian Humanism

Christian humanism, also called a "genuine humanism", "integral humanism" or "theocentric humanism" was originally proposed by the Neo-Thomism representative Jacque Maritain in his *True Humanism* (1938)[1]. Jacque Maritain (1882-1973) is one the most influential French philosophers in the world. His principal contributions mainly lie in epistemology, metaphysics, natural theology and philosophy of religion, aesthetics and philosophy of art, moral and political philosophy and philosophy of law, and philosophy of nature. The breadth of his philosophical work, his influence in the social philosophy of the Catholic Church, and his ardent defenses of human rights makes him the most influential figure in his time. His doctrine of philosophy has been the basic theory of literary creation in many writers' works. As a part of New-Thomism, his interpretation of Christian humanism has become a kind of current ideological trend in the western society.

Christian humanism seems a curious expression. When expressing his political philosophy, his philosophy of law as well as his moral philosophy, Maritain has once defined the understanding of his own as "Integral Christian Humanism". To be specific in understanding, it is necessary to explain it definition in advance. It was out of an attempt to redefine and reintroduce Christian values (appropriately updated for the modern world) that "Christian Humanism" emerged, a current whose first important proponent is often considered to be the French thinker Jacque Maritain. Christian humanism, as a philosophical tendency that has been traced back to the 12th century at least, is grounded in the mystery of God as present in history as a human being, Jesus and secondly, on several teachings of Jesus, as found in the New Testament. The reinterpretation of Christianity as a humanism developed in the first half of the 20th century and continues even today as a painful and frustrated attempt to free itself from its medieval past. Today, perhaps the simplest definition of modern Christian Humanism is a philosophy advocating the self-fulfillment of man or developing a human-centered philosophy of ethics and social action within the framework of Christian principles. Christian Humanism is more human-oriented faith and thus a product of Renaissance Humanism

and is an expression of the religious rather than the secular aspects of that European movement.

One common complaint about Christian Humanism is that in attempting to place humans as the central focus, it necessarily contradicts the fundamental Christian principle that God must be at the center of one's thoughts and attitudes. Christian Humanists can readily respond that this represents a misunderstanding of Christianity. Indeed, it can be argued that the center of Christianity is not God but Jesus Christ; Jesus, in turn, was a union between the divine and the human who continually emphasizes the importance and worthiness of individual human beings. As a consequence, putting humans (who were created in the image of God) in the central position of concern is not incompatible with Christianity, but rather should be the point of Christianity.

2. Callaghan's understanding of Christian Humanism reflected in his novel *The Loved and the Lost*

2.1 The main plot of *The Loved and the Lost*

The story develops its plot against a background of racial prejudice in Montreal, which tells a tragedy of lostness of two white people Jim McAlpine and Peggy Sanderson—the process of getting lost as shown by both the hero's failure in career of future and the final murder of the heroine. The hero Jim, the former history professor, now seeks for a position as a columnist with the prestigious Montreal newspaper *The Sun*. He is favored in his endeavor by his relationship with Catherine Carver, the daughter of the paper's publisher Joseph Carver. Catherine didn't have a good opinion of him until she met him for the first time: "She liked the stranger's low deep voice" and "She liked the stranger's laughter" [2]. In her eyes, he is his steady-going, eloquent, and profound. She even believes that "He had faith in himself". After several times meeting with him, Catherine begins to show affection to him.

However, Jim is hindered by his tangled relationship with the heroine Peggy, an ambiguous free spirit who treats everyone the same and frequents the black community in defiance of white resentment and Negro suspicion. Jim's love for Catherine is shaken when he met Peggy through his close friend Chuck Forley. His psychological contradiction may visualize under the circumstance when Jim is kissing Catherine, he "was to hold her against him, afraid she would know his heart was not beating against hers, and know, too, that his mind was somewhere else, enchanted by a glimpse of something else. If he had only mentioned the girl it wouldn't be like this" [2]. Jim convinces himself that Peggy is naïve but the inadvertent precipitator of violence, so he makes efforts to protect her and to win her love. Tragically enough, at a crucial moment, when Peggy's old belief tends to crumble and she sincerely wants to start a new life with Jim after having a narrow escape at a Negro café, Jim's faith in her wavers owing to his hidden racism, selfish pride, ambition and intolerance. Jim betrays and leaves Peggy when gaining her is almost secured. The next day, he not only finds she is mysteriously murdered and lost to him forever, but also finds his future with *The Sun* is ruined, so he is ultimately preoccupied by the strong poignancy of loss.

Jim tries to understand Peggy—and risked his career to save her. He feels restless, disappointed, regretful...

I know what happened, Peggy. I know why you're gone. In a moment of jealous doubt his faith in her had weakened, he had lost his view of her, and so she had vanished. She had vanished off the earth. And now he was alone. [2]

2.2 The three dimensions of Callaghan's Christian humanism in his literary creation

Heavily influenced by Maritain's moral and political philosophy and philosophy of religion, Callaghan has put its good use in his works. His ideas about the understanding of Maritain's philosophy can be found expression in three main aspects: his analysis the pursuit of human freedom, his probe into human nature, and his expectations to human's moral and spiritual perfection through his protagonists in his novels. Further explanations and analyses on the three aspects are as follows:

A key notion in Maritain's moral philosophy is that of human freedom. He says that the "end" of

humanity is to be free but, by “freedom”, he does not mean license or pure rational autonomy, but the realization of the human person in accord with his or her nature—specifically, the achievement of moral and spiritual perfection. Both of his moral and political philosophies are mainly fulfilled through the analyses of human nature.

Callaghan advocates human freedom, because Maritain says that the end of humanity is to be free. He does not mean license or pure rational autonomy, but the realization of the human person in accord with his or her nature.

Like Maritain, Callaghan’s analysis of human nature is also established on the basis of his distinguishing between the human being as an individual and as a person. As Maritain says, human beings are “individuals” who are related to a common, social order of which they are parts. At the same time, they are also person. The person is a “whole”, is an object of dignity. Human beings should participate in a “common good”. In his book *Integral Humanism*, Maritain examines the evolution of modern thought from the crisis of medieval Christianity to the bourgeois individualism of the nineteenth century and the totalitarianism of the twentieth. In this evolution he sees the tragedy of “anthropocentric humanism” which he calls metaphysics of “freedom without grace”. With the Renaissance, humanity began to see its own destiny and its own freedom as no longer linked to the workings of grace: “To [man] alone it belongs hence forth to make his destiny, to himself alone it belongs to intervene like a god, by a dominating knowledge which absorbs within it and surmounts all necessity, in the conduct of his own life and in the functioning of the great machine of the universe delivered over to geometric determinism.”[3]

Callaghan looks forward to human’s moral and spiritual perfection. Maritain believes that human beings are the syntheses of materials and spirits, whose sole moral obligation is improvement of social order. In terms of moral and spiritual perfection, the novel is a society overwhelmingly harsh for anyone to be unaffected. Callaghan combines the corrupted modern world in the 20th century with the ideal one in his mind to show his discontentment. The protagonists in his novels are the media for Callaghan to embody his political ambition and understanding of Christian. Therefore, Callaghan’s dissatisfaction with the present world finally gestates his dream to redeem and improve it.

2.3 Christian humanism in Callaghan’s novel *The Loved and the Lost*

In the novel *The Loved and the Lost*, Christian values play an important part in our understanding of the story. The cross represents the sacrificial love of Christ to save mankind from original sin, and the old church could suggest the Christian religion before it became too much a part of the political order of worldly societies. Peggy could be placed under the banner of the true Christian church as opposed to that represented by her father or the priests. All these religious elements constitute Callaghan’s expression of Christian humanism.

In the novel, Canadian society contains its own brand of racism and different characters represent different social classes and social organizations. Out of responsibility to perfect the society morally and spiritually, the heroine, Peggy Sanderson is an archetypal female figure associated with the rejection of the garrison culture—a figure prevalent in Canadian writing. She functions as a moral center—a person who does not care about color, race, or class at all. She does not want to discuss these issues; she even makes them seem irrelevant. To treat everyone the same and to pursue “sympathetic friendship” with Negroes are her notions of innocence and integrity.

Besides, she is also the typical representative in pursuit of human freedom. There is a good deal of discussion in the novel about an individual’s responsibility to fit into the “rules”, “patterns”, “order” of organized society. However, each individual has to “make up his or her mind about what we see going on,” as Peggy puts it[2], and sometimes his subjective perspective pits the individual against the social order. If anything is certain in the design of the novel, it is that Callaghan favors the integrity of the individual over conformity to social conventions if a choice must be made. Callaghan was not an anarchist, though he admired the individual who never yield to outside forces. He portrays the quest for individual integrity as extremely difficult to win, and dangerous to maintain. However he nowhere indicates that there is no need for order, or that the individual can

challenge society capriciously.

Close scrutiny of his use of Christian humanism, we find that Callaghan reflects the growing sophistication of Canadian fiction after the war. He seems to have wanted to write what has come to called “moral fiction” and has found the open parable his most accessible door. However, he knew enough of the modern spirit to resist imposing a precooked moral recipe on his reading public. His analysis on human nature, human’s expectation for freedom and human’s moral and spiritual perfection is delicate and subtle. Therefore, he invites a mode of expression seemingly not so strong ostensibly but more violent than any other kind of feelings.

3. Conclusion

Callaghan is an innovator who combines American naturalism with Canadian color. He further developed American naturalism into his own style in literary creation, known as “Callaghanese” fiction: essentially a moral tale, structured like a romance, embroidered with realistic details, and lacking a definitive conclusion. It is because he is a moralist who is trying to probe human nature, human freedom and human moral and spiritual perfection. In effect, we have Callaghan’s growing belief in the spiritually liberating powers of an articulated aesthetic Christian humanism. Such Christian humanism mainly comes from the influence of great French philosopher Jacque Maritain.

Integral Christian humanism is Maritain’s most important analysis of the application religious principles to the secular realm, and it establishes the framework for Thomist responses to all particular temporal issues. It is feasible to attribute the religious themes in Callaghan’s novels to Maritain’s theology. There are striking parallels between Maritain’s thought and Callaghan’s themes, and the philosophy can often illuminate the fiction. His religious attitude manifested himself in an artistic concern for and celebration of the temporal world in opposition to the fashionable modern authors who rejected “this world and the stuff of daily life.”

Callaghan realizes the expression of Christian humanism through the analysis of human nature, the pursuit of human freedom and their moral and spiritual perfection of protagonists in fiction. The protagonist Peggy Sanderson in his novel *The Loved and the Lost* finds the contradiction between her own set of value and the society. She chooses to struggle with the sin but eternally redeemed, which the dignity of humanity is rooted in the incarnation. This makes Callaghan believe that human beings have free will to sin but also the responsibility to seek public grace and forgiveness. At the same time, he is looking forward to social change and innovation against disorder.

References

- [1] Chris Baldick, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, pp. 102-103, 2000.
- [2] Morley Callaghan, *The Loved and the Lost*, pp. 8, pp. 17, pp. 22, pp.192, 1952.
- [3] Jacque Maritain, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, pp. 124, 1943.