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Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*: A Literary Challenge to the Catholic Faith

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Abstract

This paper examines Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* as a critical engagement with Roman Catholic doctrine through the lens of the author's "uneasy Catholicism". It argues that Greene, often labelled a "Catholic novelist", in fact adopts a persistently sceptical stance toward Catholic teachings, shaped by his self-described position as an "agnostic Catholic". The study first outlines Greene's complex relationship with faith, highlighting his intellectual conversion to Catholicism and his enduring doubts regarding the existence and nature of God. It then provides a concise overview of key Catholic doctrines, particularly the seven sacraments and the concepts of salvation and damnation, which structure the moral universe that the novel interrogates. The analysis demonstrates how *The Heart of the Matter* functions as a critique of institutional Catholicism through the tragic trajectory of Henry Scobie. While initially portrayed as morally upright, Scobie's excessive sense of responsibility and compassion ultimately lead him into adultery, guilt, and suicide. The novel is read as exposing tensions within Catholic doctrine: marriage appears as a source of moral entrapment rather than sanctification, confession fails to provide genuine spiritual relief, clerical authority proves inadequate in addressing psychological and moral doubt, and the doctrine of damnation is revealed as rigid and ethically problematic when

confronted with human complexity. Through Scobie's inner conflict and eventual despair, Greene highlights the gap between doctrinal absolutism and lived moral experience. The paper concludes that the novel does not simply reject Catholicism but rather critiques its inflexibility, suggesting the need for a more adaptive and humane understanding of religious practice. In doing so, Greene exposes tragic contradictions within Christian morality itself and raises a broader question about whether religion should dictate human experience or evolve in response to it.

Keywords: *The Heart of the Matter*; Graham Green; Roman Catholicism; Faith and Doubt; Institutional Critique; Christian Morality.

Whether it is religion that shapes culture or is the other way around is a controversial query that numerous scholars have incessantly endeavoured to resolve. Literature as part and parcel of culture has often been considered to be a determinant factor in challenging theological heritages that have been established as the immutably venerated 'sacred'. Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* is a perfect example of a literary work that is corrective of a deeply entrenched faith, namely, Catholicism. Despite the epithet of the "Catholic novelist" different critics used to describe Graham Greene because of the religious themes his major novels tackle, this paper sheds light more on latter's self-description as an

“agnostic Catholic” as it is more helpful to understand his critical stance vis a vis some preeminent precepts of Catholicism in *The Heart of the Matter*. Accordingly, in the beginning of this paper, Graham Greene’s “uneasy Catholicism” is highlighted by reporting his own testimony (from an interview with Marie-Francoise Allain) about his faith. Then, this paper explores some of the major tenets of Catholicism, videlicet, the Catholic Sacraments and the concepts of damnation and salvation. What eventually ensues is the examination of the secular dimension of Greene’s novel as a critical narrative of Catholicism as an organized religion that is no longer able to cater for the spiritual needs of its believers, and thus has to open itself to change. Noteworthy, the term “secular” here refers to a mode of interpretation that privileges human experience over theological abstraction, revealing the tension between doctrinal certainty and moral ambiguity. As explained in *A Secular Age* (2007) by Charles Taylor, secularism should not merely be conceived as the decline of religion or the separation between church and state, but as a transformation in the conditions of belief themselves. In the secular age, faith is no longer an unquestioned or socially given certainty; rather, belief in God becomes one possibility among many competing alternatives.

I. Graham Greene’s Uneasy Faith:

Gradually, the status of religion in the Western world in general has officially been relegated and contained by the secular state apparatuses since the Enlightenment. In England, however, although the Reformation succeeded, to some extent, in curbing the influence of the church on the public sphere, giving thus room for a more or less secularized way of life, strict “laws against blasphemy” still seemed insuperable “barriers to Free thought” until the nineteenth century (Taylor 3). Likewise, although the Victorian era was an age of reason, science and industrial revolution, religion never ceased to be a major theme in its literature. Charles Dickens’s novels (*David Copperfield* and *Christmas Carol*) and Matthew Arnold’s poetry and prose (*Dover Beach* and *Culture and Anarchy*) are clear examples of literary works, which make a conspicuously substantial use of religious themes. The first half of the twentieth century also witnessed a rise in works of literature that make of religion a central theme to either show the latter’s crucial role in the anxiety-stricken modern life or point to its deficiency to provide the modern individual, whose faith was shaken by the ravaging wars, with the spiritual solace they sought. Graham Greene’s novels are among the most compelling literary works, which address the Catholic Church and its teachings in the most ingeniously critical of manners.

Born to and raised by a strict Anglican family, Greene would later lose his faith at a very early age (Norman). Although in a famous interview with Marie-Francoise Allain Greene denies being an atheist, he does not hide his early critical attitude towards religion. He says, “Religion bored me to death with its Sunday services and its endless readings from the Bible. Anglicanism meant absolutely nothing to me, no more than Buddhism or Catholicism” (*The Uneasy Catholicism of Graham Greene*). This loss of faith can explain his transient embrace of Communism which resulted in his membership in the Communist Party of Great Britain “for only four weeks as a 19-year-old student” (Evans and Hencke). His conversion to Catholicism is reported to have been induced by his love for Vivienne Dayrell-Browning, a devout Catholic, whom Greene could not have married had he not converted to her faith (Norman). Greene’s words do also testify to his unusual conversion to Catholicism. Asked by Marie-Francoise Allain whether he “had become a Catholic the way one falls in love”, Greene answers, No, I needed convincing arguments for the possibility that God exists. I’m very fond of an Anglican divine, Bishop Gore; he was also a writer, and he opened one of his books with the words “The hardest thing is to admit the existence of God.” I’m with him there. I was perfectly ready to accept the historical existence of Christ, but how was I to start from a hypothesis as vague as that of the omnipresence of God? (*The Uneasy Catholicism OF Graham Greene*)

The above-mentioned confession of Greene displays his sceptical attitude towards religion which later gained him the reputation of the “agnostic Catholic” mentioned earlier. This reputation is confirmed in the same interview as he says that his “conversion was not in the least an emotional affair. It was purely intellectual”. Even after his conversion, Greene’s scepticism never waned. Critics such as David Lodge have noted that Greene’s fiction cannot be understood as an external attack on Catholicism. Rather, Greene writes from within a deeply Catholic moral framework, dramatizing the tensions between doctrine, guilt, pity, and human responsibility. His novels therefore function less as theological rejections than as internal explorations of spiritual and ethical conflict.

Fond as he seems to be of self-assigning epithets as one can notice in the interview, Greene emphasises his uneasy relationship with his newly embraced faith by calling himself a “doubter” When I was baptized, I made it clear that I had chosen the name of Thomas to identify myself not with St. Thomas Aquinas but with St. Thomas Didymus, the doubter. I eventually came to accept the existence of God not as an absolute truth but as a provisional one. (*The Uneasy Catholicism OF Graham Greene*) It is this skeptical attitude

that may serve this paper to probe Greene's dissatisfaction with the Catholic faith's obsolete teachings as manifest in *The Heart of the Matter*. Before this examination though, it is necessary to give a brief account of the seven Sacraments upon which the Catholic faith is based, concomitantly defining two of the major concepts in Catholicism, namely, "salvation" and "damnation".

II. The Seven Sacraments: A Believer's Salvation, A Sinner's Damnation

According to the Roman Catholic Church, to be a Catholic one has to go through the seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Confession, Marriage, Holy Orders, and the Anointing of the Sick (Richert). If one observes all the Sacraments, they are believed to lead a "graceful" life and salvation in the hereafter just as Christ promised his followers. The first three Sacraments are referred to as the Sacraments of "initiation". Baptism declares the entrance of a Catholic into the Catholic faith. It "removes the guilt and effects of Original Sin and incorporates the baptized into the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ on earth. [One] cannot be saved without Baptism" (Richert). Confirmation is the second Sacrament; it "perfects the Sacrament of Baptism" by increasing "the sanctifying grace, which makes the soul holy and pleasing to God" (Richert). The third rite of initiation, the Holy Communion, is one of the most important of the seven Catholic Sacraments. Also known as the Eucharist, this rite is a religious service wherein Catholics eat bread and wine, which symbolise the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, hence the expression to live in Christ.

Although Catholics may "receive the Communion at least once a year" during Easter time, they are encouraged to seek the reception of the Communion on a daily basis if they can. Because of its paramount importance, it is deemed an outrageous act of sacrilege if any Catholic receives the Holy Communion while they are in a state of mortal sin. "In 1 Corinthians 11:27-29", St Paul warns that if one "unworthily" receives Communion by being in a state of mortal sin, it is as though they "eateth and drinketh damnation, . . . they shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord" (qtd. in Richert). Only after the penitential rite of Confession, the fourth Sacrament, can one who is conscious of their mortal sin receive Holy Communion. The rite of Penance, another term for Confession, is believed to grant "Absolution" and Reconciliation with God to those who have committed venial and mortal sins but shown serious contrition. Confession as a ritual can take place in a "confessional", a small box, wherein the penitent absolves himself through confessing his sins to his priest. It can also take place in Mass as the congregation

repeats along with the priest a penitential prayer known as the Confiteor.

The fifth Sacrament is Matrimony, which refers to the natural bond between two spouses (a man and a woman) for "procreation and mutual support", and it has a strong religious connotation for Catholics as it symbolizes the "union between Jesus Christ and his Church" (Richert). Through marriage, the spouses help each other gain the "sanctifying grace" and work together not only to achieve "God's creative act" but also to help accomplish "the redemptive act of Christ" (Richert). Failing the sacred conjugal bond through betrayal is a damning sin as it is done against the divine union of Christ and the Church. The Holy Orders and the Anointing of the Sick are the last two Sacraments. While the former refers to "the ordination" of clergymen who can ordain (bishops), offer Mass, hear confessions (priests and bishops) and baptize (deacon and bishop), the latter refers to the priest's "anointment with oil and recitation of prayer to a seriously ill or a dying Catholic" (Richert).

As it has already been mentioned, salvation and damnation are key concepts in Catholicism. Unlike the selective notion of Calvinist Predestination, which grants salvation to the "elect", Catholicism emphasises 'free will'. "God provides sufficient grace for all men to be saved. Man, in the exercise of his free will, can accept or reject grace" (Burnham). Accordingly, only those who cling to God's given grace by showing perseverance in the exercise of the seven Sacraments can attain salvation, thus honouring Christ's sacrifice. Salvation guarantees being in God's eternal company (Burnham). On the other hand, the same concept of 'free will' is determinant as to the Catholic notion of damnation. Damnation refers to "the conscious eternal loss of the vision of God. The state of being damned by reason of one's own deliberate estrangement from God" (Catholic Dictionary). It is the result of one's straying away from God's path out of one's own will, through an intentional choice to commit mortal sins and total disregard of the Sacraments without repentance. Damnation, as indicated in Matthew 25, is "eternal because it is irrevocable, being pronounced to be unending in its consequences" since the damned can no longer atone for mortal sins (qtd. in Catholic Dictionary).

After this cursory look at the seven Sacraments and the concepts of salvation and damnation which are central to Roman Catholicism, the focus now shifts to Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* in order to examine the critical and corrective vision the novelist develops toward his faith. It must be noted, however, that in *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate*, Terry Eagleton challenges the reductive modern assumption that religion is

merely an irrational or outdated belief system. Instead, he argues that religion endures because it attempts to address enduring questions related to suffering, morality, guilt, and the meaning of existence. Such a perspective is particularly relevant to *The Heart of the Matter*, where Catholicism functions not merely as a rigid doctrinal structure, but also as an ethical and psychological framework through which profound spiritual conflicts are experienced.

III. The Heart of the Matter: Critique of an Obsolete Faith

The Heart of the Matter starts with some resonant religious words of Charles Péguy as an epigraph that somehow foreshadows Greene's unconventional views as to the Catholic conception of sin and its significance. The epigraph says, "The sinner is at the very heart of Christianity . . . No one is as competent as the sinner in Christian affairs. No one, except the saint" (3). These words do perfectly reflect the novel's major content, or rather Greene's own vision of sin and uprightness, damnation and salvation. Set in a fictitious town in the British colony of Sierra Leone in the midst of World War two, *The Heart of the Matter* tells the tragic story of Henry Scobie, whose spiritual life undergoes an overwhelming crisis as his "saintly-like" goodness ironically turns to be the besetting sin that causes his "descent" into damnation. Scobie, the deputy police commissioner, is initially portrayed as a righteous person whose strong faith in God cannot be merely measured by his "broken rosary" or lack of any ostentatiously religious aspects in his demeanour, but should be rather seen through his good deeds which display tremendous sense of pity, responsibility and justice.

Throughout his narrative, Greene expresses a number of scathing criticisms of Catholicism I outline in the following analysis. The first criticism Greene aims at Catholicism is implicitly worked out through his description of the "sacred" marital bond between Scobie and his wife. Greene shows how this marriage, which is a Catholic Sacrament that is supposed to grant a sanctifying grace and leads to salvation, can in fact be damning. It is true that as a "good" Catholic spouse, Louise seems to be worried about Scobie's religious commitment as she often asks him such reprimanding questions as "why didn't you go to Mass today? . . . You haven't got much faith, have you, Ticki?" (Greene 20). She even warns her husband that "missing Mass on Sunday's a mortal sin, just as much as adultery" (214). However, this care about her husband's salvation is contradicted by her burdening and selfish demands. After hearing the disappointing news about her husband being passed over for promotion, Louise's constantly sullen mood and never-ending complaints about the colony's inclement weather and unpleasant people do remarkably intensify. The depressed state of his wife as well as her

permanent pleas to leave the colony seem to have their toll on Scobie, who blames himself for being unable to make his spouse happy, and thus fails to honour the "sacred" prenuptial promises. By making his protagonist entangle himself with a notorious diamond smuggler, Yusuf, whom Scobie asks for a loan to satisfy his wife's request to leave for South Africa, Greene throws the first stone at the Catholic's notion of marriage as a sanctifying grace. It is this first act of surrender to his wife's needs that is going to drag Scobie into a world of sin and corruption. Instead of salvation, Scobie's marriage proves to be damning, as it is the cause behind his spiritual demise. Marriage here becomes the first moral trap produced by duty and pity.

Right before being trapped into the state of mortal sin, adultery, Scobie is seen as a true, humble believer who says prayers before sleep such as "Our Father, the Hail Mary and . . . an Act of contrition". Reciting these prayers "was a formality, not because he felt himself free from serious sin but because it had never occurred to him that his life was important enough one way or another". Although Scobie "didn't not drink, didn't fornicate didn't even lie", "he never regarded this absence of guilt as a virtue" (115). He even admonishes himself for missing "Mass for insufficient reason" (115). Striking enough, these prayers are noted in Scobie's diary, which is a sort of a private "confessional". However, the same prayers, which give some lulling comfort to Scobie who falls asleep before finishing them, are pejoratively described later in the novel as boring and useless when said in the church. Reciting "My Father and Hail Mary" while waiting for his turn in the Church for Confession, Scobie, who could hear "Father Rank's voice [whispering] monotonously", felt "the awful languor of routine [fall] on his spirits" (155; emphasis added). This description of Scobie's negative state within the church somehow echoes Greene's early "boredom" with religion in general and the Catholic Sacraments and "services" in particular.

More staggering, during the confession, Scobie reveals that he has started to doubt his faith saying, "I feel - tired of my religion. It seems to mean nothing to me. I've tried to love God, but . . . 'I'm not sure that I even believe.'" (155). In response, the words Father Rank tells Scobie are barely reassuring. Instead of trying to understand the true nature of Scobie's doubts as to his belief in God, Father Rank blames the weather, suggesting that Scobie is mistaking "tiredness for . . . disbelief" (155). Through Father Rank's hollow words and Scobie's unsuccessful search for religious reassurance from his priest who represents the Faith's teaching with rigour, Greene manages to call into question the efficiency of two Sacraments, the Holy Orders and Confession and by the same token Catholicism. In other words, Father Rank's inability to

provide soothing words to a Catholic believer on his way to damnation is less a failure of a priest to deliver his ordained service, but it is more of deficiency in the faith itself whose rigid, hollow tenets of Confession and the Rite of Penance prove inefficient to give him any spiritual solace. The criticism of these two Sacraments is developed all along Scobie's abysmal spiritual decline.

Abandoned, or rather temporarily relieved, by his wife's departure, Scobie finds himself tempted into adultery after falling in love with Helen Rolt. During this adulterous affair, which is driven by pity for the frail young widow rather than lust, Scobie is tormented by his feeling of guilt. Hearing about her husband's liaison, Louise feels partly responsible and decides to come back to the colony. Scobie's afflicted state gets even worse as he is now under pressure from two fronts: the wife who keeps exhorting him to go to Mass while he is in a state of mortal sin and the mistress who has become as burdening a liability as his wife. At this point of the narrative, Greene again hits at the core of the Catholic Rites of Confession and the Holy Orders. Although aware that he cannot receive the Holy Communion while in a state of deadly sin, Scobie satisfies his wife's incessant demands to go to Mass. However, he must first absolve himself through the Rite of Reconciliation. Just before his Confession to Father Rank about his adulterous affair, Scobie who is unable to cause more pain neither to his wife nor to his mistress, meditates about the rigidity of Catholicism which only offers mechanical answers to all the problems with no possibility for change. He muses; We Catholics are damned by our knowledge. There's no need for me to work anything out - there is only one answer: to kneel down in the confessional and say, 'Since my last confession I have committed adultery so many times etcetera; to hear Father Rank telling me to avoid the occasion: never see the woman alone. (229)

Despite being sure of Father Rank's sticking to the Catholic teachings, Scobie still hopes for salvation through the "magic word" which never comes (230). Father Rank's failure to receive Confession from Scobie, as these latter refuses to "promise not to see" Helen again (231), is in fact a failure of the Catholic faith to provide the spiritual assistance even to one of its saintly-like figures who happen to err.

The last criticism to the Catholic faith Greene manufactures in this extraordinary work of fiction is levelled against the Catholic concept of damnation. Walking out of the confessional after being told by Father Rank that "nobody can begin to forgive the uncontrite", Scobie, "for the first time", sees how his "footsteps have taken him out of sight of hope" (231). The feeling of "despair", which is synonymous to damnation in Catholicism, gets stronger as Scobie's ill

judgement, a symptom of his being "too damned honest", results in another mortal sin. Although he seems to have made his mind to cut ties with his mistress and confess his affair to his wife, Scobie, in a sudden and blasphemous manner, writes a letter to Helen telling her that he will never abandon her and that he loves her "more than himself, more than [his] wife, more than God" (189; emphasis added). However, this letter never reaches Helen. Suspecting that Ali, the servant, may have taken it to give it to Louise, Scobie tells Yusuf about his suspicion and asks for assistance. By so doing, Scobie gets his loyal servant and fifteen-year long companion killed at the hands of the Syrian villain. At this point, Scobie's despair takes shape as he starts planning the most damning of all sins, suicide.

Suicide is an unforgiveable mortal sin as it is indicated earlier in the narrative by Father Clay. In an exchange that foreshadows the tragic end of Scobie's life, Father Clay, talking about Pemberton, a young policeman who puts an end to his life, says, "Suicide . . . 's too terrible. It puts a man outside mercy" (86). Despite his knowledge of the Catholic faith, Scobie, or rather Greene himself, starts counter arguing that the scriptures are not to be taken as true for all situations. Greene says that maybe Pemberton "wasn't a Catholic. Perhaps that makes a difference. Invincible ignorance, eh?" (87). Picking holes in Father Clay's immutable religious teaching, Scobie sarcastically remarks, "If it was murder you'd simply change your mortal sinner, Father" (87). Father Clay's unconvincing answer is that "a murderer has time" to repent. Scobie's mocking tone and inquisitive attitude manage to challenge Father Clay's teachings, as the latter's judgement that a person who commits suicide is eternally damned, whereas someone who takes another person's life still has hope for salvation is rather debatable, to say the least.

So, Scobie's suicide isn't just a failure to observe the sacraments of his beloved faith; in contrast, it's faith's most extreme and distorted manifestation. It is the action that emerges from his ethical universe, not outside it. And the inconsistency of his choice lies in the fact that he commits a mortal sin to prevent committing further sins. In his line of thought, and in his logic, suicide is the final attempt to preserve moral coherence where every available option has already been ethically compromised, a movement from despair to misdirected love. What seems like a rupture is, in reality, the end point of an interior religious thought pushed to its limit.

The dialogue between Scobie and Father Clay about the eternally damning sin of killing oneself is echoed at the very last chapter of the novel after Scobie himself Commits a carefully planned suicide. Furious at Louise's insinuation

about her dead husband's eternal damnation as the latter "must have known that he was damning himself" and thus "it's no good praying" for him, Father Rank surprisingly voices quasi the same opinion expressed earlier in Scobie's conversation with Father Clay about suicide and its debatably dooming repercussions (289). Clapping the cover of a diary to show his anger, Father Clay says, "For Goodness' sake Mrs. Scobie, don't imagine you- or I- know a thing about God's mercy" (289). When she tries to remind him that "the Church says ...", Louise is instantly interrupted by Father Clay saying, "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" (289). Father Rank's assertion that the Church "knows the rules" but cannot quite understand "what it is in the human heart" shakes the base of the practice of doctrinal judgment itself. It suggests that moral truth cannot exclusively be confined to a set of external rules, but is formed by interior experience. If so, a total condemnation of suicide becomes ethically unstable as it represents an approach that cannot tolerate the complexity of living moral suffering.

This opinion of Father Frank is substantiated by Scobie's tormented soul that leads him to suicide. Scobie's motives to kill himself are purely religious. Apart from his inability to cause more pain to the women he pities the most and his tremendous feeling of guilt for being responsible for Ali's death, what makes Scobie decide to put an end to his life is his love for God. In an internal monologue, Scobie woefully addresses the Divine saying, 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 . . . God - you are ill with me. I can't go on, month after month, insulting you. I can't face coming up to the altar at Christmas - your birthday feast - and taking your body and blood for the sake of a lie. I can't do that. You'll be better off if you lose me once and for all. (272)

Scobie's final act demonstrates what Terry Eagleton calls religion's profound preoccupation with pain, guilt, and moral paradox rather than with absolute beliefs. Scobie does not take his life out of a lack of faith but precisely because he has too much of it, thanks to the Catholic code. Hence, the real problem in Scobie's death is how to reconcile man's pity with divine absoluteness. Hearing Scobie's genuine private rite of Confession, one can barely doubt his utmost love for his Creator. Just as Father Frank insinuates, Scobie's religiously pure heart may grant him God's mercy despite committing the desperate mortal sin of suicide. But despite Scobie's earnest religious proclivity and his unwavering desire not to cause harm, he is complicit in his own destruction. His downfall isn't imposed solely on him by externality or dogmatism; it

is shaped, indeed, by how he internalizes Catholic moral imperatives. Scobie takes full responsibility for the suffering of others as if he alone must be the one who carries the heavy burden of their pain, guilt and deprivation. As a result, this excessive consciousness around moral responsibility compromises his own judgment; compassion turns into obligation, and obligation turns into self-erasure. In his efforts to save everyone from misery, he erodes a thin veneer of space left for his own moral survival. Thus, what we get is not a passive victim of circumstance, but a man who actively participates in the logic of his undoing. His unwillingness to consider competing moral imperatives about his wife, his mistress and God does not ease tension but exacerbates one until the only acceptable option is self-destruction. Scobie's tragedy resides in that contradiction itself: his religiously "pure" intentions do not save him from ruin, but rather become the very medium through which ruin is realized.

This tension suggests Greene, is not merely challenging Catholic teaching, but exposing an internal contradiction within Christian morality itself. David Lodge argues, in *Graham Greene 1966*, that Greene's fiction operates within a Catholic imaginative framework even when it questions doctrine. The system's logic, for Greene, appears to generate demands that become impossible to live by in practice. Absolute compassion, which structures Scobie's entire ethical being, gradually turns destructive because it offers no limit point where care for others can ethically stop. In this sense, sin and virtue are no longer clearly separable categories, but overlapping pressures that trap the subject in moral paralysis. Scobie is therefore not destroyed by failing Catholic doctrine, but by taking its moral logic with absolute seriousness, pushing it beyond what human life can sustain.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, as it has been shown throughout the analysis outlined above, clearly echoes a secular vision as to the core of religion in general and Catholicism in particular. By aiming his criticisms at the rigidity of the Catholic faith and the "impotency" of its Sacraments, Greene makes a strong secular statement about the essence of religion which has to cope with the ever-changing spiritual needs of the believers. What lend credence to Greene's corrective criticism of the traditional theological notion of Catholicism and its immutable rituals are Talal Asad's ingeniously secular insights as to the conception of the heart of religion. In his essay "Reading a Modern Classic: W.C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*", Talal Asad affirms.

The essence of each religion is not something unchanging and unchangeable but something that is at once to be preserved and defended as well as argued over and reformed in the changing historical circumstances that the tradition inhabits. And the people are religious to the extent that they belong actively to developing religious traditions, preserving or reformulating them. (208)

Greene adheres to the same secular conception expressed in the quote above by dint of his literary work, which highlights the deficiency of the Catholic Sacraments (Confession, Matrimony, Holy order and the Holy Communion) and their interrelated concepts of salvation and damnation. This literary attempt to reformulate the sacred heritage is attested by Greene's own words. Told by Marie-Françoise Allain that he seems to be seeing the problems of Catholicism as an insider, Greene responds, "I'm speaking not as a theologian, only as a writer who happens to be a Catholic and perhaps even a Protestant inside the church. For I've always considered it better to be a Protestant inside rather than outside" (The Uneasy Catholicism of Graham Greene). Hence, thanks to *The Heart of the Matter*, Greene manages to "protest», from within, against the old untouchable tenets of his faith, contributing thus to some extent to their reformulation. Finally, Greene's novel is successful in raising an anxiously legitimate question with which we would like to end this paper: should religion be at the service of humanity or the other way around?

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