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IN SEARCH OF A VISION:
CONCEPTS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH IN FOUR CANADIAN NOVELS

by

Sandra Marion Parsons Orser

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
February, 1992

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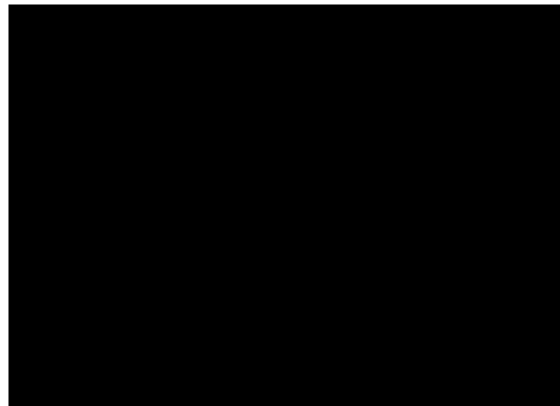

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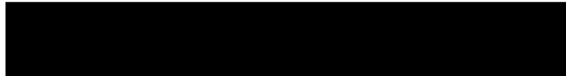

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To the glory of my Lord and Saviour,

through whom "I can do all things" (Phil. 4:13)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis constitutes a study of the views of Protestant Christianity and the organized Church in texts by Sinclair Ross (As For Me and My House), Margaret Laurence (A Jest of God), W. O. Mitchell (Who Has Seen the Wind), and Robertson Davies (Fifth Business). Both the rigid systems of belief and morality that are stereotypically associated with Calvinism and the dead and powerless quality of Christian practice are questioned. Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies all see organized Christianity as an unscriptural and limiting force that cannot meet the social, psychological, and spiritual needs of those involved with it.

In each chapter of the thesis, the effects of an unyielding religious heritage on a community are examined. Characters in each novel consider alternative systems of belief, including atheism and the adoption of false gods, but find such systems disappointing. Finally, the characters attempt to salvage some portion of the Christian faith they have tried to reject. Hope, it seems, lies in adopting principles of love and service and in recognizing the importance of the miraculous, all of which constitute part of the Christianity outlined in the New Testament. Each author points out the difficulties in implementing the teachings of the Gospels but emphasizes that the attempt should be made.

Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies maintain that acceptance of traditional ideas about religion is not enough, and the systems of belief presented in their respective fictions are often unconventional. What may initially appear to be a rejection of Christianity emerges, however, as a rejection only of static form and harsh moral codes. Each text examined provides the conclusion that the spiritual aspect of life, however it is understood, and the Gospel-based principles underlying the Christian faith continue to hold great value in the twentieth-century world.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

Col.	Colossians
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
Eccles.	Ecclesiastes
Eph.	Ephesians
Exod.	Exodus
Ezek.	Ezekiel
Gal.	Galatians
Gen.	[illegible]
Heb.	[illegible]
Isa.	Isaiah
Jas.	James
Jer.	Jeremiah
Josh.	Joshua
Lev.	Leviticus
Matt.	Matthew
Nah.	Nahum
Neh.	Nehemiah
1 Pet.	1 Peter
2 Pet.	2 Peter
Phil.	Philippians
Prov.	Proverbs
Ps.	Psalms
Rev.	Revelation
Rom.	Romans
2 Sam.	2 Samuel

Song Sol.	Song of Solomon (also Song of Songs)
1 Tim.	1 Timothy
2 Tim.	2 Timothy
Zeph.	Zephaniah

EXPLANATORY NOTE

I have chosen in this thesis to draw all Scriptural quotations from the New King James Version of the Bible. It is obvious from the quotations that appear in their various novels that Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies were familiar with the King James Version, but this translation has fallen out of favour with many modern readers who find it ponderous and difficult to understand. In the interests of clarity, I first tried using a completely modernized version of the Scriptures, but I found that this was unsatisfactory since many of the words and phrases quoted in the novels under consideration had been changed completely, and thus, quotations from Scripture often seemed to bear little resemblance to the portions of the texts they were intended to support. The New King James Version represents a compromise. In order to make the Scriptures easier to understand, those who have prepared this version have modernized various aspects of the King James style. "Thee" has become "you," for example. The flow and much of the phrasing of the King James Version have, however, been retained.

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INTRODUCTION

When reading any amount of Canadian literature, one can scarcely help but notice the large number of references to religion and religious experiences that appear. In many early novels, churchgoing is presented as an accepted part of the Canadian experience. It is a social, as well as a spiritual, activity. The church is the centre of the community and the Sunday service the highlight of most families' weekly activities. In The Imperialist, a novel written in 1904, Sara Jeannette Duncan writes, "Within its prescribed limitations, it [churchgoing] was for many the intellectual exercise, for more the emotional life, and for all the unfailing distraction of the week."[1]

A glowing presentation of Protestant Christianity[2] and

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[1]Sara Jeannette Duncan, The Imperialist (1904; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971) 60.

[2]In The Canadian Encyclopaedia ("Protestantism," The Canadian Encyclopaedia, 1988 ed.), Tom Sinclair-Faulkner makes it clear that the term "Protestant" is very difficult to define and that Protestantism has few, if any, hard and fast distinctives. For the purposes of this thesis, "Protestant" is used to refer to any branch of Christianity other than Roman Catholicism. The observations made about the Church, however, are not directly linked to any actual or supposed Protestant distinctive, nor are they unique to novels in which the authors have been concerned with the Protestant faith. Similar observations about organized Christianity occur, for example, in the novels of Morley Callaghan, which deal almost exclusively with the Roman

organized churches in Canada is particularly evident in books belonging to the literary genre known as the "regional romance." In stories of this type, authors look back with nostalgia on what they like to think of as a past golden age when moral values were firmly in place and the right ones inevitably triumphed in any situation. One such regional romance is The Man from Glengarry by Ralph Connor (pen name for Charles W. Gordon, himself a Presbyterian minister). This book is characteristic of the genre in that it contains numerous references to the spiritual character of the Glengarry folk and attributes much of their success to their relationship with God. In his preface to the novel, Connor writes with deep affection about the Presbyterian faith practised in the community:

> The manner of life and the type of character to be seen in those early days have gone...forever.... The men are worth remembering. They carried the marks of their blood in their fierce passions, their courage, their loyalty; and of the forest in their patience, their resourcefulness, their self-reliance. But deeper than all, the mark that reached down to their hearts' core was that of their faith, for in them dwelt the fear of God. Their religion may have been narrow, but no narrower than the moulds of their lives. It was the biggest thing in them. It may have taken a sombre hue from their gloomy forests, but by reason of a sweet, gracious presence dwelling among them it grew in grace and sweetness day by

---

Catholic Church. I have chosen to use novels that focus on Protestant denominations simply because I myself am more familiar with the various doctrines and practices that are associated with Protestant churches than with the theologies of the Roman Catholic Church.

day.[3]

There is evidence in this book of a deep respect for God's word and for God Himself, a respect shown even by those who have little use for the Church. When Mrs. Murray, the minister's wife, attempts to help the very ill Macdonald Dubh, she tries to lead him through the Lord's Prayer. Macdonald, however, cannot bring himself to forgive those who have hurt him, and so he refuses to repeat the line "'And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.'"[4] Although he is not a churchgoer, he has such reverence for the words of Scripture that he will not say them lightly and untruthfully. The reference to the Lord's Prayer, the names of various psalm tunes, a discussion of the account found in Exodus of God's destruction of the Egyptians, and many other references to Christian thought and practice are all inserted as part of the story, the implication being that the author believes the average reader will be familiar with all these aspects of Christianity and its teachings. One of the highlights of the book is a detailed description of the Glengarry church service. The furnishings of the sanctuary, the singing, the structure of the service are all described with loving pride by Ralph Connor. The service is so impor-

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[3]Ralph Connor, preface, The Man from Glengarry, by Ralph Connor (1901; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960) xiii.

[4]Ralph Connor, The Man from Glengarry (1901; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960) 38.

tant to the people of Glengarry that they do not begrudge the time it takes, even though it is a double service, one part in English and the other in Gaelic. When Maimie, an outsider, finds the singing "'awfully queer,'" Mrs. Murray gives a sentimental response:

> "Isn't it beautiful?" her aunt answered, with an uncertain smile. She was remembering how these winding, sliding, slurring old tunes had affected her when first she heard them in her husband's church years ago. The stately movement, the weird quavers, and the pathetic cadences had in some mysterious way reached the deep places in her heart, and before she knew, she had found the tears coursing down her cheeks and her breath catching in sobs. Indeed, as she listened today, remembering these old impressions, the tears began to flow....Maimie...noticed the tears and sat wonderingly, and as the congregation swung on through the verses of the grand old psalm there crept into her heart a new and deeper emotion than she had ever known.[5]

Through incident and character, as well as third-person commentary, Ralph Connor makes his readers aware of the high and sacred nature of the practice of Christianity in the time-honored Glengarry way.

The Man from Glengarry was published in 1901, and it is interesting to contrast Connor's view of the Presbyterian religion and its followers with that of Hugh MacLennan. In Each Man's Son (1951), MacLennan has Daniel and Margaret Ainslie attend a Presbyterian service much like that described in the Connor text. Gone, however, is the respect for the service that was present in the former book. Fol-

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[5]Connor 74.

lowing her solo, Margaret attempts to flirt with her husband with a wink, and Daniel responds with a meaningful look; Margaret's mother leans across to congratulate her on her solo; and

> During the whole fifty-seven minutes of Sandy MacAlistair's extremely pessimistic sermon Margaret sat watching her husband while he read his copy of the Greek Testament which rested throughout the week in their hymnal rack.[6]

This service is also, as was that in Connor's novel, a double service, the second session being conducted in Gaelic "with new psalms, new prayers, and a whole new sermon in Gaelic by Sandy MacAlistair."[7] MacLennan notes that "The choir had no separate part in this service but it was expected to remain."[8] Such a comment emphasizes the dead quality of the tradition by which these worshippers are bound. MacLennan says of the same kind of Presbyterianism written about by Connor,

> To Cape Breton the Highlanders brought...with them an ancient curse, intensified by John Calvin and branded upon their souls by John Knox and his successors - the belief that man has inherited from Adam a nature so sinful there is no hope for him and that, furthermore, he lives and dies under the wrath of an arbitrary God who will forgive only a handful of His elect on the Day of Judgment.
>
> As no mortal human being can exist in constant awareness that he is sinful and doomed through no fault of his own, the Highlanders

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[6]Hugh MacLennan, Each Man's Son (1951; Toronto: Macmillan, 1971) 81.

[7]MacLennan, Son 82.

[8]MacLennan, Son 82.

> behaved outwardly as other men do who have suffered the curse or forgotten its existence. But in Cape Breton they were lonely. They were no part of the great outer world. So the curse remained alive with them, like a somber beast growling behind an unlocked door. It was felt even when they were least conscious of it. To escape its cold breath some turned to drink and others to the pursuit of knowledge.[9]

Of his protagonist, Daniel Ainslie, MacLennan writes,

> Even when he tried to find strength by denying God's existence, he lived as though the hound of heaven were snapping at his heels. Even when he displayed his knowledge and intelligence as a priest displays his beads, he felt guilty because he knew so little and was not intelligent enough.[10]

Such an attitude toward the Presbyterian faith is in marked contrast to that exhibited by Connor's Ranald Macdonald. After talking with Mrs. Murray, the minister's wife and an advocate, albeit a gentle one, of Calvinistic beliefs, Ranald thinks, "He had been for an hour in another world where the atmosphere was peace and the light clear."[11] Sitting in church and watching Mrs. Murray's look of "peace and quiet courage," Ranald does feel "his heart fill up with a sense of shame for all his weakness." Immediately following this, however, he becomes aware of an inner strength born of the faith he has seen personified in his friend:

> ...his soul knit itself into the resolve that if he should have to walk his way, bearing his cross

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[9]Hugh MacLennan, prologue, <u>Each Man's Son</u>, by Hugh MacLennan (1951; Toronto: Macmillan, 1971) viii.

[10]MacLennan, prologue, <u>Son</u> ix.

[11]Connor 226.

> alone, he would seek the same high spirit of faith and patience and courage that he saw shining in her grey-brown eyes.[12]

These two examples of novels in which a branch of Christian religion plays a major part serve to illustrate some of the contrasting views about organized Christianity and the mainstream denominations that were revealed in Canadian fiction in the first half of this century. What was once unquestioning pride in a predominant Canadian religion turned to condemnation of an inherited curse. It would be misleading, however, to suggest that such condemnation is unique to modern times or confined to Presbyterianism. In 1888, James De Mille's A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder was published, and in it, the doctrines accepted by much of the Christian sector of this country were severely criticized. The novel is a fanciful tale of a young man's voyage to a strange society whose natives, supposedly, have a moral value system completely opposite to that traditionally held by North American Christians. Closer examination of the natives' beliefs, however, reveals that they constitute a satiric comment by De Mille on the bleak and sombre aspects of religious practice. The Kosekin "hate life and love death," [13] yet one wonders if a stranger coming into a Canadian

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[12]Connor 282.

[13]James De Mille, A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder (1888; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969) 115.

Canadian church service would not come to a similar conclusion about Christians upon hearing the lyrics of some of the hymns in which this earthly world is designated as a vale of tears and the goal of all Christians is said to be to leave it and reach heaven. Like the Kosekin, many Christians appear to "'think death the greatest blessing.'"[14] Among the Kosekin the "ruling passion is the hatred of self,'"[15] while according to traditional Christian belief, the human part of men and women is said to be evil, and there is a need, the Church teaches, to subjugate the physical to the spiritual. The Kosekin wish to give away all their possessions to achieve the blessings of poverty and hunger. Christ's words, "'Blessed <u>are</u> the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt. 5:3),[16] have been interpreted by many Christians to mean that a stark and unadorned existence is the mark of a truly spiritual believer. The Kosekin who hate the light and love the darkness are not really so different from those Canadians who practise a dark and dour brand of religion.

Even in a novel like <u>The Man from Glengarry</u> in which,

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[14]De Mille 117.

[15]De Mille 116.

[16]All references to the Scriptures in this thesis are to The Holy Bible, <u>New King James Version</u>, prophecy ed. (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1985). The underlining that occurs in these references is intended to indicate the italics that appear in this version. The italicized words are not found in the original manuscripts but have been added in order to facilitate translation of the Scriptures into English.

as already noted, a certain kind of Christianity is held in the highest regard, the stark doctrine adhered to by the elders of the Glengarry church is questioned. At the funeral of a young man who has died without making an outward profession of faith, one of the elders feels obliged to point out his terrible fate to all those in attendance. Elder Peter McRae declares,

> "'As the Lord liveth, what the Lord said unto me, that will I speak,' and it is not easy....And this is the word of the Lord this night to me....'There is none righteous, no, not one, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.' That is my message, and it is laid upon me as a sore burden to hear the voice of the Lord in this solemn Providence, and to warn one and all to flee from the wrath to come."[17]

McRae proceeds in similar vein, much to the dismay of the young man's family and friends. An American who is not part of the religious community staunchly defends the dead man, however, pointing out the good life he lived. Then, in the face of the strict Presbyterians who are unwilling to grant that a man can be saved by his works, Connor has his beloved Macdonald Bhain tell the gathered people,

> "You have been hearing the word of the Lord through the lips of His servant, and I am not saying but it is a true word; but I believe that the Lord will be speaking by different voices, and although I hev not the gift, yet it is laid upon me to declare what is in my heart, and a sore heart it is, and sore hearts hev we all. But I will be thinking of a fery joyful thing, and that is that 'He came to call, not the righteous, but

[17]Connor 105.

> sinners,' and that in His day many sinners came about Him and not one would He turn away. And I will be remembering a fery great sinner who cried out in his dying hour, 'Lord, remember me,' and not in vain. And I'm thinking that the Lord will be making it easy for men to be saved, and not hard, for He was that anxious about it that He gave up His own life."[18]

In The Imperialist, the criticism of organized churches and their clergy takes on an ironic tone. Duncan refers to the Sunday worshippers as "fellow-beings bound by the same convention to the same kind of behaviour."[19] In her treatment of the love affair between the Reverend Hugh Findlay and Advena Murchison, the young minister is seen not as an infallible representative of God, but as a very human, young man bound by the dictates of an impractical moral code. Although Duncan treats her subject in an amusing way, her words give evidence of an increasing dissatisfaction with the time-honored doctrines and traditions adhered to by the Christian community.

As the twentieth century progressed, Canadian fiction departed completely from the pastoral vision of the regional romance. In a number of novels, criticism of established Christian doctrines and religious practices became more severe and widespread. As the effects of the Industrial Revolution became more and more firmly entrenched and as the

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[18]Connor 106.

[19]Duncan 60.

society staggered from the effects of a depression and two world wars as well as the rise of Fascism, Communism, and a variety of other political and religious movements, accepted patterns of moral thought and action were brought into question by writers. For some time now fiction has reflected the fact that it is not acceptable to hold one's beliefs merely because they were once held by one's parents and grandparents. There is a need, authors have asserted, to look closely at spiritual matters and to determine what is of use in the modern world and what should be cast aside in order to formulate a kind of faith that is useful in combatting the forces that are allied against human beings in a rapidly-changing society. Many authors have questioned whether the Church and its teachings still have value in the twentieth century. They have asked whether those who adhere to the established doctrines actually experience joy and blessing, as the Bible promises they will, or whether their beliefs constitute a denial of the life force. They have wondered if those who cling to traditional beliefs are simply trying to force on those around them the same code of restrictive behaviour and belief within which they themselves are caught. They have asked whether it is necessary to have Christian faith at all and whether, if Christianity has outlived its usefulness, anything else can and should replace it.

A number of writers have extended this questioning of

the merits of the Christian faith to include questions about the very nature and even the existence of God. Is He, as Christianity has always asserted, completely righteous and just, or is it possible that God sometimes deals unjustly with His creation? Some writers have asked whether God is, in fact, interested in the world He has created, and if He is interested, what is the nature and extent of His involvement in the lives of human beings? Questions have been raised as to whether individual communication with God is really possible and whether human beings can ever hope to understand His ways. Challenges involving the traditional concept of God and the principles for which He has long stood in the minds of North American churchgoers would have once been unthinkable, but they are signs that Canadian writers, at least, have provided some reappraisal of the long-accepted concepts of religious orthodoxy.

Questions with respect to spiritual issues have been, in fact, so important to Canadian authors that they form part of the development of a considerable number of major characters in twentieth-century Canadian fiction. Margaret Laurence's women, for instance, cry out angrily against a God whom they believe to be unfair and cruel. In The Stone Angel, when the elderly Hagar is confronted by the ineffectual minister, Mr. Troy, she says, "'I've never had much use for prayer, Mr. Troy. Nothing I prayed for ever came to anything.'" In answer to Mr. Troy's suggestion, "'Perhaps

you didn't pray for the right things,'" Hagar responds, "'Well, who's to know? If God's a crossword puzzle, or a secret code, it's hardly worth the bother, it seems to me.'"[20] When Mr. Troy asks, "'Don't you believe...in God's infinite Mercy?'", Hagar, thinking of her dead son, blurts out, "'What's so merciful about Him, I'd like to know?'"[21]

Stacey Cameron, the mother and wife in The Fire-Dwellers, says of her father-in-law, a former minister, "...I long to tell him I don't see life his way - gentle Jesus meek and mild and God's in his heaven all's right with the world."[22] Stacey is not even sure she still believes in a Deity: "God knows why I chat to you, God - it's not that I believe in you. It's somebody to talk to. Is that all? I don't know. How would I like to be only an echo in somebody's head?"[23] Stacey thinks of God as a vengeful Being who exacts guilt and sometimes harsher penalties from His children when they transgress His laws. She even fears that such a God may require the life of one of her children as payment for her sins. Holding her son Duncan in her arms after his near-drowning, Stacey prays, "'God, let him be all right, and I'll never want to get away again, I promise. If

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[20]Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel (1964; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968) 119.

[21]Laurence, Angel 120.

[22]Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers (1969; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973) 65.

[23]Laurence, Fire-Dwellers 66.

it was anything I did, take it out on me, not on him - that's too much punishment for me.'"[24]

Disenchantment with the traditional ideas of faith and God is evident in the story "Age of Faith" found in Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women. As part of the rites of adolescence, Del Jordan struggles to find a kind of Christianity in which she can believe. In spite of her mother's atheistic beliefs, Del searches for proof that God and faith are real. For a time she accompanies the Jordans' boarder to the United Church:

> On wet windy Sundays, snowy Sundays, sore-throat Sundays, I came and sat in the United Church full of this unspeakable hope; that God would display Himself, to me at least, like a dome of light, a bubble radiant and indisputable above the modern pews; that He would flower suddenly as a bank of day lilies below the organ pipes. I felt I must rigidly contain this hope; to reveal it, in fervor of tone or word or gesture would have been inappropriate as farting.[25]

Not finding the kind of faith she looks for in the United Church, Del begins attending the Anglican services. There she finds that the ritual has "a sort of last-ditch dignity,"[26] and she is intrigued by the presence of Mrs. Sherriff who has survived so much tragedy in her life. In spite of all her attempts at prayer and her fervent desire to believe, however, Del finds that when her petition

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[24]Laurence, Fire-Dwellers 293.

[25]Alice Munro, Lives of Girls and Women (1971; New York: New American Library, 1974) 80.

[26]Munro 83.

involves the life or death of her brother's beloved dog, Major, a traditional faith is inadequate to meet her needs:

> God would not alter it. If God was on the side of goodness and mercy and compassion, then why had he [sic] made these things so difficult to get at? Never mind saying, so they will be worth the trouble; never mind all that. Praying for an act of execution not to take place was useless simply because God was not interested in such objections; they were not His.
>
> Could there be God not contained in the churches' net at all, not made manageable by any spells and crosses, God real, and really in the world, and alien and unacceptable as death? Could there be God amazing, indifferent, beyond faith?[27]

Anger and frustration like that just described is by no means limited to female protagonists. In Hugh MacLennan's The Watch That Ends the Night, George Stewart states,

> I had made Catherine [his wife] the rock of my life. As a boy, at least for a time, I had been religious and believed that God cared for me personally. In the Thirties I had said to myself: There is no God. Now I had Catherine and Catherine's fate and that winter, feeling confident of being equal to it, I said to myself: "What difference does it make if there is no God? Or, if God exists, why worry if He is indifferent to justice?"
>
> For on account of Catherine I could not believe that if there is a God He is just. Catherine had a rheumatic heart which had handicapped her from childhood and it was not on account of her sins, or of her parents' sins, that the seeds of this obscure disease had singled her out among hundreds of thousands of others who went free....And I was proud that winter because - so I believed - I could do so without begging for help from a Power which, if It existed, I could not respect because It had allowed this to happen to

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[27]Munro 96.

the woman I loved.[28]

Such cries, some fearful, some angry, from characters who have been unable to understand the will and ways of God sound again and again throughout Canadian literature.

The criticism of the organized Church and its teachings in Canadian fiction seems to involve two major issues. The Church is criticized as an institution in which dry and lifeless tradition has replaced the vibrancy of Christianity as it is put forward in the New Testament, and the harsh beliefs referred to in the quotations from The Man from Glengarry and Each Man's Son are strongly condemned for their influence on Canadian communities and individuals. Canadian authors and literary critics alike attribute these beliefs in large part to Calvinism, a system of religious thought developed by the Reformer John Calvin. In deference to those who embrace the Calvinist doctrine, it must be pointed out that much of the picture of Calvinism that appears in Canadian literature is based on a stereotype. John T. McNeill, in his book The History and Character of Calvinism, writes,

> There are some who deplore the return of an interest in Calvin's thought. For one thing, it imports discomfort among those who would like to attain a blissful state of intellectual neutrality and detachment. It is also supposed to bear a threat of discipline to the wayward and, some would say, danger of moral tyranny. The view has been expressed that 'Calvinism' is a basic cause

[28]Hugh MacLennan, The Watch That Ends the Night (1958; Toronto: Macmillan, 1975) 6.

> of the personality disorders now prevalent in America, especially those that involve an exaggerated sense of guilt. It may be that the word is used in this context in a loose way to include excessive parental control wherever it is found. Certainly this can still be found in America; but the instances best known to this writer happen to occur in homes that are distinctly non-Calvinist. It would be interesting to have comparative statistics on these matters; I have been unable to find any, and generalizations based on hearsay may be ultimately based on prejudice. Statistics of a sort are available with regard to imprisonment for crimes; whether reliable or not, they give a report favorable to the groups under Calvinist influence. But I do not think that it has been alleged that our prisons are filled with Presbyterians.[29]

Regardless of the truth of McNeill's observations, however, the widespread stereotype exists, not only in Canadian literary circles, but in the minds of some respected theologians. The tenets ascribed to Calvinism in this thesis are part of the common concept of this much-maligned system of religious thought.[30] Dead tradition and the Calvinist doctrine, as it is perceived by Canadian authors, are interconnected. Calvinism does involve the idea that righteousness will be attested to by outward signs or marks of grace, and Canadian authors see men and women observing tradition in worship to the letter in order to be deemed of the elect

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[29]John T. McNeill, The History and Character of Calvinism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954) 433-34.

[30]The same stereotype that governs the general perceptions of Calvinism is also frequently applied to the Puritans and their beliefs. Several of the critics quoted in this thesis refer to the Puritans as a stern and joyless people, a concept that cannot be applied accurately to all Puritans any more than the generally-accepted ideas about Calvinism can be applied to all Calvinists.

of God, a concept that will become clear as various aspects of Calvinism are discussed. In some cases, it is asserted, the harshness of Calvinist doctrine has become too burdensome for the church members to bear, and consequently, some of it has been abandoned. The empty forms of worship have remained, however, long after they have ceased to serve any purpose in the congregation's spiritual development.

The Calvinist doctrine against which so many authors and characters justly or unjustly rebel underlies much of the Free Church movement and was brought to Canada by the early settlers. The Canadian Encyclopaedia states that "Calvinism was first introduced into Canada by French HUGUENOTS [French Protestants]"[31] and that the infiltration of the Huguenots and their ideas began as early as 1541.[32] Kenneth Scott Latourette notes that

> English and Scottish settlers and some New Englanders, all predominantly Protestant by ancestry, moved into what were later the Maritime Provinces and the provinces of Quebec and Ontario. Numbers of those who were loyal to Britain when the Thirteen Colonies revolted migrated into these regions. Here, with some help from the British Isles, and, in the case of the Methodists, from the United States, the largest Protestant communions became the Church of England, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, and the Baptists.[33]

According to The Canadian Encyclopaedia, "By the end of the

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[31]"Calvinism," The Canadian Encyclopaedia, 1988 ed.

[32]"Huguenots," The Canadian Encyclopaedia, 1988 ed.

[33]Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of Christianity, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) 2: 1035.

Victorian period the PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH was the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, the second-largest Calvinist group being the BAPTISTS."[34]

Although Calvinist beliefs are a firmly established part of the Canadian heritage, this spiritual inheritance is, in the minds of Canadian authors and critics, a bleak one indeed. The perceived harshness of Calvinist doctrine is blamed for the guilt, pride, discrimination, and belief in a fearsome God that influence the lives of Canadian believers. Edward Moore writes that according to Calvinist thought a person "is not a sinful child of the Father. He is a being totally depraved and damned to everlasting punishment. God becomes his Father only after he is redeemed."[35] The knowledge that they were considered absolutely depraved and sinful, even by God, is seen as a key factor in causing Calvinist believers to suffer inordinate guilt and to adopt an attitude of abjection and hopelessness. Paradoxically, such believers could also become filled with pride, feeling as they did that they had been chosen by the Almighty for privileged status in His kingdom. As members of the elect, they were likely to scorn those who did not give evidence of adhering to the same moral and spiritual codes as themselves. Belief in a God

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[34]"Calvinism."

[35]Edward Caldwell Moore, An Outline of the History of Christian Thought Since Kant (New York: Scribner's, 1912) 208.

who would arbitrarily and according to His "irrational will"[36] choose those who were destined to enjoy eternal bliss and sentence others to suffer in hellfire would certainly lead to the concept of a Jehovah who valued vengeance and retribution far more than love and mercy. Dennis Duffy calls this God "remote, mysterious and angry."[37] Paul Tillich observes that the doctrine of predestination, the idea that God has already chosen those who will accept Him and eventually live and reign with Him, "introduces us to an absolute mystery. We cannot call God to any account. We must accept it purely and simply and drop our own criteria of the good and the true."[38] According to Edward Moore, Calvin himself later rejected this doctrine and accepted "the unlimited theory of the atonement."[39] Still, the doctrine of predestination remains a major part of the accepted stereotype of Calvinist faith.

Tillich notes that an individual could be certain of his or her election

> only by producing the marks of election in terms

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[36]Paul Tillich, A History of Christian Thought, ed. Carl E. Braaten (1967; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1968) 268.

[37]Dennis Duffy, "Heart of Flesh: Exile and the Kingdom in English Canadian Literature," Journal of Canadian Studies 18 (Summer 1983): 59.

[38]Tillich 268.

[39]Moore 343.

> of a moral life and an economic blessing. This means that he tried to become a good bourgeois industrial [sic] citizen. He believed that if he were this, he had the marks of predestination.[40]

Here, in this belief, is the essence of the so-called "Protestant work ethic" that has been portrayed as so harmful to the psyches of many protagonists in Canadian literature.[41] Dennis Duffy comments that according to the covenant that was thought by believers to exist between God and His people

> the material rewards would...remain commensurate with the epic efforts required for that development. The size of these rewards generated what became an irresistible and single-minded concentration upon the reward while, correspondingly, the spiritual covenant was relegated increasingly to a matter of lip service.[42]

Paul Tillich further observes that Calvin saw the Church as having "three marks: doctrine, sacraments, and discipline. The element of discipline is decisive."[43] Here is the beginning of a faith that seemingly demands conformity to its beliefs and codes and that each individual

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[40]Tillich 269.

[41]Writing in The Canadian Encyclopaedia, John S. Moir states, "The so-called 'Protestant work ethic' has been credited rather inaccurately to Calvinism" since the ideas it entails along with "puritanical views on sexual matters, sabbatarianism, TEMPERANCE and individualism [are] all attitudes shared by most Christian denominations during the Victorian era" ("Calvinism"). It cannot be denied, however, that although they may not be the only contributing factors, the tenets of Calvinism have been at least partially responsible for the formation of such attitudes.

[42]Duffy 59.

[43]Tillich 272.

suppress emotion and individuality under a cloak of propriety. The denominations with Calvinism at their core are seen as fostering a religion based on an absolute set of rules and restrictions and creating a joyless people intent to a large extent on examining their sins and shortcomings as well as those of others. A society based on such creeds and doctrines could easily become closed to those who digress in any way from the established norm. There would be no room in the company of the elect for those who did not show the accepted marks of grace and of the Spirit's working. Those in charge of such a society could easily become moral dictators and watchdogs. Calvinism, as portrayed by the theologians quoted here, as well as by Canadian authors and critics, is a belief system of absolutes and requires letter-perfect obedience not only to the dictates of Scripture, but also to those man-made additions thought necessary by the spiritual and moral leaders of churches and communities. The idea that God has already made eternal decisions for mankind is seen as having been carried over into the Church. Men and women, being unable to plan or think for themselves, are bound to adhere to the doctrines and dictates that are presented to them. As perceived by the Canadian literary community, Calvinism is, as Liesl Vitzliputzli tells Dunstan Ramsay in _Fifth Business_, "'a

cruel way of life.'"[44]

Fifth Business is the only one of the novels under consideration in this thesis in which the term "Calvinism" is actually mentioned. In A Jest of God, however, the town Laurence creates is peopled with Scots-Presbyterians, and the Presbyterian Church, particularly in Scotland, is widely-known for the strong Calvinistic flavour of its doctrines. In Who Has Seen the Wind, the Presbyterian Church again plays a major role, and there are several references to John Knox, a Scottish Reformer who was influenced largely by John Calvin's doctrines, although he added to Calvin's thought and teachings and adapted these to his own purposes. Only As For Me and My House lacks any reference to Calvinist influence, and the description of the Church in that novel is similar in many points to the descriptions of the Church in the other texts discussed. Consequently, it seems fair to say that whether or not the word "Calvinism" is actually used in all of these books, the doctrines of Calvinism that have been perceived by Canadian authors as rigid and harsh underlie the criticism of the Church in all four of these novels.

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[44]Robertson Davies, Fifth Business (1970; Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1977) 226.

It is interesting to note that whereas Canadian authors and critics often see Calvinism as "cruel," its advocates would point out that their belief is not in the cruelty of God, but rather in His sovereignty. Because His authority is supreme, God has the right to bring about His purposes in the lives of human beings by any method He may choose.

The paternal figure who embodies the dictates of a stern religious code is central to a number of Canadian texts. Such men give the appearance of living in accordance with the rules of behaviour prescribed by organized Christianity. They are the heads of their homes, exercising harsh and unjust discipline; they make a show of piety in public and often in their personal lives as well. Their spirituality, however, is purely a matter of form, and there is no evidence of Christian compassion in their lives. In Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Caleb Gare rules his children with an iron hand and controls his wife by using to his advantage the guilt and shame she feels over an early love affair that resulted in the birth of an illegitimate son. Caleb holds out the word of God to his family only when and if he sees fit to do so. Frederick Philip Grove's Amundsen in Settlers of the Marsh is another such character. Grove writes that the man's attempts at prayer sound "as if he were rather laying down the law to his creator than invoking his blessing."[45] Amundsen makes a display of Bible reading and prayer, but he shows no charity toward his neighbours and no compassion for his family. His insistence that his wife submit to his demands and desires eventually leads to her death and scars his daughter emotionally for life. In Charles Bruce's The Channel Shore, James Marshall is

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[45]Frederick Philip Grove, Settlers of the Marsh (1925; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966) 21.

described as being "inflexible in religion; he held family prayers at night and would not hire a man who swore or drank."[46] This Christian man (a Methodist) is firmly against the union of his nephew Grant with Anna Gordon, the girl Grant loves. James' opposition is largely because Anna is Roman Catholic. When Grant confesses that he cares for this girl, his uncle replies,

> "It's too bad, that. Too bad that things so often make it impossible for us to follow...to do what we would like...to follow our inclinations. Impossible for you....But that is what we know, from experience. Difference in outlook, religion, thought -...I've seen six or seven mixed marriages in the last thirty years along the Shore, Grant. They failed. All failed. Nothing left but remorse."[47]

Readers may well wonder whether these marriages failed mainly as a result of inflexible opinions like the ones James expresses. Jason Currie of Margaret Laurence's The Stone Angel is also a man formed by the Calvinist tradition. He has been influenced by the Protestant work ethic and is a shrewd businessman in the tradition of the Calvinist Scots from whom he is descended. His attention to business and the pride that has grown in him have, however, dulled his capacity for love, compassion, and forgiveness. The stone angel that stands over his wife's grave in the cemetery is a symbol of what is most important in Jason Currie's life. He

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[46]Charles Bruce, The Channel Shore (1954; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1984) 82.

[47]Bruce 91.

often tells his daughter, Hagar, that the angel was "brought from Italy at a terrible expense."[48] Although he likes to make grand gestures as far as his family is concerned, Jason is unwilling to offer his only daughter any forgiveness or understanding when she, against his wishes, marries Bram Shipley who is not of her class. Grandfather Connor in Laurence's A Bird in the House is another of these patriarchs. He is faultless in his adherence to the dictates of discipline, but Vanessa observes that it is up to his wife to bring love into the Connor household.

In the majority of novels in which questioning and condemnation of the Christian faith and its tenets occur, the characters, having come through the crisis of anger and disbelief, find that it is not the faith itself that is invalid, but the static and often harmful structures and definitions that have been imposed on that faith. Whereas organized religion and its teachings are seen to warp and inhibit people in their development as full human beings, Christianity, when it is allowed to emerge as an expanding, vibrant force, is recognized as an integral part of life, and many of its values are seen as important and necessary. Only the inhibiting doctrines and practices of Christianity are rejected. Out of the questioning emerges a vision of a flexible Christianity that has its source in the teachings of the Gospels and that stands in opposition to rigidly-

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[48]Laurence, Angel 3.

defined Christian religion.

It is apparently in the Christianity of the Scriptures that a number of writers find some resolutions for the perplexing questions that trouble their characters. In The Stone Angel, Hagar finally makes peace with herself through an act of love and service like those called for by Christ in the Gospels when she drops her pride and gets a bedpan for a fellow hospital patient. In The Watch That Ends the Night, the volatile Jerome Martell, who has rejected his early Christian upbringing and has become intensely involved in political conflict, comes to a new understanding of life and death when, in a prison cell in China, he has a vision of the risen Jesus. Jerome is able to give comfort to his friend George Stewart by quoting Jesus' words, "'I am the resurrection and the life.'"[49] Following his encounter with Jerome, George, who had formerly abandoned belief in God, is able to recall the Parable of the Talents[50] and to say of his wife at her death, "...her face showed what I can only describe as the joy of the Lord."[51]

In this thesis I have chosen to deal with four novels

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[49]MacLennan, Watch 367. See also John 11:25.

[50]See Matt. 25:14-30.

[51]MacLennan, Watch 373. The reference to "the joy of the Lord" is taken from Nehemiah 8:10 in which the prophet tells the Israelites, "...the joy of the Lord is your strength."

in which the questioning and examination of the existing Church and its established doctrines and practices are central: As For Me and My House by Sinclair Ross, A Jest of God by Margaret Laurence, Who Has Seen the Wind by W. O. Mitchell, and Fifth Business by Robertson Davies. Although, as indicated, attempts to re-evaluate the Christian faith and its practice are evident in a number of Canadian novels, in some these questions are merely peripheral to the major theme, or they form one theme among many running through a novel. For example, in Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women, although the questions Del asks about faith are important in her journey toward maturity, so are many other issues - her awareness of her sexuality, her acceptance of her family and her heritage, and her recognition that human beings are marvellous, mysterious creatures who can never be fully understood. Therefore, I examine novels in which the questioning about organized Christianity and the spiritual development of the main character or characters are of primary importance. I also discuss novels that take into consideration not just one, but a number of the aspects of faith and doctrine that have been mentioned in this introduction.

I have chosen four novels that have their own well-defined standards of established Christianity against which the characters in the works react and in which there are alternatives to this powerful establishment. It is cer-

tainly not my intention either to unduly criticize one denomination or to advocate one over another. Instead, I attempt to show that the kind of questions raised in these four novels are extremely complex and move beyond denominational concerns. The denomination to which Philip and Mrs. Bentley belong is never specified. They are simply representative of clergymen and their families serving in small Protestant churches throughout the dustbowl prairies. Many of the characters in Who Has Seen the Wind are associated with Presbyterianism, a faith that is directly rooted in the teachings of John Calvin. The evangelical demonination to which the hired man Ab belongs is never mentioned and thus can be seen as representative of fundamentalist churches in general. In A Jest of God, Rachel visits both the United Church and the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn, which, with its emphasis on the emotional expression of one's faith and exercise of the gift of tongues, may be seen as a branch of the Pentecostal Church. In Fifth Business, Dunstan Ramsay comments on the Presbyterian faith to which his family subscribes, but the book also contains portraits of Anglicans, Baptists, and Roman Catholics.

The four novels under consideration employ a variety of narrators, thus emphasizing a number of different points of view concerning the subjects being examined and making it clear that questions about the Church and its interpretations of Christianity are not limited by age or gender. In

As For Me and My House, a male author attempts to see situations through the eyes of a female narrator. In Who Has Seen the Wind, W. O. Mitchell uses a child protagonist. A Jest of God again features a young, woman narrator, but this time the author is herself a woman. In Fifth Business, Robertson Davies uses as his narrator an old man looking back at his past. Who Has Seen the Wind is the only novel examined in which an omniscient narrator provides commentary that directs readers in regard to the issues in question. The other three texts are complicated by first-person narration that is not wholly reliable. Protagonists' thoughts and comments must be weighed against those of other characters as well as against the actual events of the narrative in order to determine their veracity.

Whatever the narrative strengths and limitations of these novels, religious and class prejudice occasioned by a closed morality are evident in them. The protagonists suffer the intense guilt that results from inadequate human attempts to live within the restrictions that are part of the accepted code of behaviour, and there is a sense of barrenness and a lack of joy among all those who are trapped within rigid systems of religious thought. In addition, the idea of a God of retribution pervades the thinking of many of the characters, and they live in fear that He will wreak His vengeance upon them. The brutal prairie heat and dust of As For Me and My House may be seen as evidence of a God

who is indifferent to the prayers of His children; Saint Sammy of Who Has Seen the Wind assumes the guise of a biblical prophet and predicts vengeance against the sinful townsfolk and the greedy Bent Candy. Rachel sees God as a monster who makes her the brunt of His Divine jokes, and Dunstan Ramsay has an encounter with the God who demands from human beings amounts of guilt and suffering equal to the instances of suffering they have caused.

Along with the criticism and, in large part, the rejection of a rigid system of religion, in each book there are some viable suggestions made toward solving the problems that have been pointed out. In As For Me and My House, Mrs. Bentley discovers that while adherence to a strict behavioural code results in feelings of bitterness and guilt, her recognitions of truth and her attempts to understand, accept, and forgive her husband and the townspeople offer opportunities for growth and possible release from an intolerable situation. In A Jest of God, Rachel finds that practical aid and concern from other characters in the novel as well as the expansion of her concepts of God are the keys that release her from the life-denying, and even sinister, religions practised in Manawaka. In Who Has Seen the Wind, Miss Thompson suggests that "'a little sweetness and light'"[52] in the form of love and concern for one's neigh-

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[52]W. O. Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind (1947; Toronto: Macmillan, 1972) 287.

bours would vastly improve the character of the town in which she teaches. There is also the suggestion in this text that strict Presbyterianism and strait-laced evangelical religion could benefit from the incorporation of those aspects of faith that cannot be humanly explained. In Fifth Business, Dunstan Ramsay learns that in order to avoid religion that is "stricken, lifeless, [and] unreal,"[53] individuals must include love, forgiveness, generosity, and courage in their lives. He also discovers that belief in the miraculous is the ingredient missing from the Protestantism of his childhood and that such belief is necessary if one is to begin to understand God and the relationship between good and evil.

Ross's As For Me and My House appeared in 1941, and Robertson Davies' Fifth Business was published in 1970. This indicates that the quest for answers to spiritual questions has been an ongoing one. Even though the books considered in this thesis were written over a thirty-year time span, there are an astonishing number of similarities in the ideas expressed. No matter how many changes have taken place in the world over these three decades, a shared interest in spiritual matters continues to exist among writers of Canadian fiction.

The commonly-accepted idea of Calvinism is of great concern to all four of the authors included in this thesis.

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[53]Davies 52.

Sinclair Ross, Margaret Laurence, W. O. Mitchell, and Robertson Davies have each realized the limitations of such a strict and inhibiting faith, and the bitterness and guilt of those who feel trapped in or cannot conform to its narrow standards echo through the pages of their novels. Out of the disillusionment with religious tradition and protocol, however, emerges a vision of a different way of dealing with human and spiritual relationships. As the cruel and inflexible forms of religion are rejected, they are replaced by a concept of a faith that incorporates principles of love long suppressed by belief in a wrathful God who exercises His will in seemingly arbitrary fashion to bless or damn His human creation. This is a faith that can be extended to include the non-conformists and the new ideas that are an integral part of a fast-changing, modern society. It is a faith that exchanges exacting, humanly-imposed laws and demands for Divine mysteries and miracles and is to be found, in all its aspects, in the Christianity of the New Testament. It is to the principles that are part of this purer form of the Christian message that Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies appear to be drawn in their attempts to replace traditional religion and its restrictions with a workable and constructive system of values and beliefs.

CHAPTER 1

The Quest for a "Kindlier Reality": As For Me and My House

Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House is a novel in which questions about the validity of Christianity and the nature of God abound. Nowhere in the text does Ross name the denomination with which his protagonist and her preacher husband are associated, and one wonders if perhaps this omission is deliberate so that the ideas about Christianity that Ross puts forward may be understood to apply not just to one branch of Protestantism but to Protestantism as a whole. As Sandra Djwa points out, Ross's characters "verge on the moral universal."[1] As For Me and My House is not merely a regional novel that chronicles the difficulties experienced by one small-town pastor and his wife. Ross reveals Christianity and its relationship to the lives of men and women on a much broader level, and therein lies much of the value of this book.

As For Me and My House is set in the Canadian West during the dustbowl years of the Great Depression, and Ross's

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[1]Sandra Djwa, "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross," Journal of Canadian Fiction 1.4 (Fall 1972): 49.

picture of Christianity as it is practised in small prairie towns is a bleak one. On Ross's prairie all the inhabitants face the extreme poverty occasioned by the onslaughts of dust, wind, and drought. Margaret Laurence, writing in the introduction to The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories, says that

> Ross's characters grapple with their lives and their fate, a fate partly imposed upon them by an uncaring and fickle natural order and partly compelled by their own spiritual inheritance, the pride and the determination which enable them to refuse defeat, but which also cut them off from nearly all real contact with others.[2]

Such a struggle can give the men and women who dwell on the prairie the idea that they live "in a universe which is seemingly without ordering principles or a caring God."[3] There is still, however, an unwillingness among these people to abandon the concept of a Deity completely. Sandra Djwa observes,

> Ross does not seem to be suggesting that there is no god in nature if for no other reason than that his people would not allow it. It may well be the Old Testament vengeful God...or simply the psychological projection of the will to believe. Nonetheless, the people of Ross's prairie appear to keep on waiting and believing that beyond the individual tragedies...such endurance does have value.[4]

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[2]Margaret Laurence, introduction, The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories, by Sinclair Ross (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968) 7.

[3]Gail Bowen, "The Fiction of Sinclair Ross," Canadian Literature 80 (Spring 1979): 38.

[4]Sandra Djwa, "No Other Way: Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," Canadian Literature 47 (Winter 1971): 63.

In <u>As For Me and My House</u>, Ross employs a considerable degree of ambivalence in order to make his points about the Christian faith and its adherents. Writing in <u>Canadian Literature</u>, William H. New says that in Ross's novel it is possible that "the ambivalence itself...is the desired aim."[5] Much of this quality is the result of Ross's choice of form and narrator since <u>As For Me and My House</u> is a series of entries from the diary of Mrs. Bentley, the disillusioned wife of a preacher who, she believes, is himself unconvinced of the truth of the Gospel he proclaims. Readers are presented only with Mrs. Bentley's views throughout the text and, because of this one-sided presentation of events and circumstances, are forced to assess for themselves the validity of her observations about Christianity and the way it is practised by the people about her. New writes that the ambivalence in this text is

> not based on an indecisiveness about who his [Ross's] character really is, but emerging [sic] out of a carefully constructed web of viewpoints, Mrs. Bentley's and ours, pitted ironically against each other so that we come to appreciate not only the depth and complexity of the narrator and her situation, but also the control in [sic] which Ross artistically holds his words.[6]

There is a great deal of division among critics about whether or not Mrs. Bentley's descriptions and her opinions are to be accepted at face value. Roy Daniells, in his

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[5]William H. New, "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," <u>Canadian Literature</u> 40 (Spring 1969): 27.

[6]New 27.

introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of the book, writes, "She [Mrs. Bentley] is pure gold and wholly credible."[7] A close examination of the text, however, seems to call such a statement into question and support the view that she is an unreliable narrator. Many of the events in the novel indicate that Mrs. Bentley is not always correct in her assessments of the people around her. Writing about the first night at the church in Horizon, Mrs. Bentley describes herself as "miserable with a sense of inferiority, conscious of nothing but appraising eyes on my shabby old hat and coat."[8] Partially because she is so self-conscious and feels so inferior with regard to her appearance, Mrs. Bentley has become overpossessive of her attractive husband. She admits that she is concerned about "what Philip must think sometimes when he looks from me to other women" (9) and writes, "...if ever we reach our hundredth Horizon, I'll still sit looking up and down the pews exactly as I did tonight. Frightened a little, primitive, green-eyed" (10). Mrs. Bentley's very desire not to find a rival in the congregation causes her, however, to make an erroneous assessment of the church members. She dismisses the ladies in the Horizon congregation by saying, "Not that there was

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[7]Roy Daniells, introduction, As For Me and My House, by Sinclair Ross (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) vii.

[8]Sinclair Ross, As For Me and My House (1941; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) 9. All subsequent references to As For Me and My House are to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

anyone tonight....it would have taken an imagination livelier even than mine to find much to be afraid of there" (10). She is oblivious to the attraction the strange, white Judith West will have, and in fact has already begun to have, for Philip. At home, after the initial service in Horizon, Mrs. Bentley mentions Judith's whiteness to Philip and finds that he has noticed it as well. She tells her readers, "He tries to find words to describe it, and wonders could it be put on paper" (11). Mrs. Bentley does not choose to pursue the subject further, and thus she remains unaware for some time that Judith may, in fact, be a serious rival for Philip's affections.

Mrs. Bentley's assessments of her relationship with the school teacher Paul Kirby are also in error. Although she entertains Paul a number of times when Philip is absent and charms him with her piano playing, she fails to think that Paul could perceive romantic overtones in these intimate times together. On June 7, Mrs. Bentley recounts in her diary a discussion she has had with Paul about words with specifically sexual connotations. She writes, "You learn a lot from a philologist. Cupid, he says, has given us <u>cupidity</u>, Eros, <u>erotic</u>, Venus, <u>venereal</u>, and Aphrodite, <u>aphrodisiac</u>" (76). On September 5, she asks Paul, "'You think that some day Philip will decide he can't stand me any longer?'" and Paul replies, "'He'd be a fool'" (128). When, however, when she asks her husband, "'What's wrong with Paul

these days, he never comes round,'" she is "withered" when Philip responds, "'I'd say that that's one for you to answer'" (132).

With the use of subtle markers, which are easily missed during a first or even a second reading of the text, Ross frequently signals readers that Mrs. Bentley is making an unreliable comment or observation. For instance, when Mrs. Bentley describes the initial visitors to the parsonage she writes that Miss Twill, Horizon's choir director, "all but said, 'If they were really Christians now they'd sell such vanities [the piano] and put the money in the mission-box'" (3). The phrase "all but said" indicates that Miss Twill did not, in fact, state this opinion. Her supposed remark is merely a product of Mrs. Bentley's imagination, a result of her bitterness against and her preconceived ideas about the Main Street residents of Horizon. Again, in the midst of giving extensive details about Philip's early life and what it has done to his thinking Mrs. Bentley asserts, "Likely, he often felt defeated" (31). Such a surmise casts a degree of doubt on all she has been telling readers about the Philip she knows "only in fragments, pieced together through the fifteen years I've known him" (29). It is Mrs. Bentley herself who sums up her inability to perceive the people and situations around her accurately. Having learned of Philip's affair with Judith West, she asks, "Am I the one who's never grown up, who can't see life for illusions?"

(125).

Situations and statements like those just referred to are indications that Ross does not mean Mrs. Bentley's words to be always taken at face value. William New observes that "we suspect all of her affirmations, finding in them partial truths that ring ironically against the complex realities Ross ultimately allows us to glimpse."[9] D. J. Dooley does remind us, however, that

> her general credibility as a witness must be accepted, or there is no novel. She is writing a diary, and in it she is presumed to be telling the truth. We must take for granted that the conversations which she sets down did actually occur, that the events actually happened, that people and settings look much as she describes them, and that Philip's drawings deal with the subjects she says they do and have approximately the effect she says they have.[10]

Without such provisional acceptance, the novel would lose all pretence of the mimetic structure that it posits. Dooley does qualify his observations by stating that

> the reader does not identify his consciousness completely with hers [Mrs. Bentley's]. He stands back and makes inferences which she is not able to make, and perhaps sees that underneath some of her actions there are motives which she herself does not realize.[11]

This distinction between reader and protagonist emphasizes that Ross's novel is a fascinating study in subjective

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[9]New 28.

[10]D. J. Dooley, Moral Vision in the Canadian Novel (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1979) 40.

[11]Dooley 40.

truth. It must be remembered that the events Mrs. Bentley recounts, if seen from the viewpoint of Philip or Steve or Paul, might take on a completely different character. Consequently, As For Me and My House cannot, as some critics have asserted, be regarded as the story of Philip the failed artist and struggling preacher. It can only be the story of Mrs. Bentley. The thoughts expressed are her thoughts and must be read in this context.

In order to understand the challenging ideas about Christianity and its practice that Ross is raising through Mrs. Bentley's observations, it is necessary to look beyond the narrator's bitterness and grief. It is, in fact, necessary to treat this novel in much the same way that Philip recommends treating a work of art. Mrs. Bentley writes,

> According to Philip it's form that's important in a picture, not the subject or the associations that the subject calls to mind; the pattern you see, not the literary emotion you feel. (80)

She notes that Philip says that "'A good way to test a picture is to turn it upside down. That knocks all the sentiment out of it, leaves you with just the design and form'" (154). Readers must look beyond the "literary emotion" (80) that is called up by the diary portrait of a young wife who lives a miserable life of alienation from her husband and community and whose wifely fidelity is eventually rewarded by her husband's affair with the girl she has befriended.

It is against the Christianity of the small towns in

which the Bentleys serve that Mrs. Bentley rebels. This is evident on the first page of the novel when she writes about the code of behaviour required of a parson's wife. She says of the citizens of these towns, "In return for their thousand dollars a year they expect a genteel kind of piety, a well-bred Christianity that will serve as an example to the little sons and daughters of the town" (3). Mrs. Bentley supports this assertion by recalling a scene in the first town in which Philip ministered: "...one day when they caught me in the woodshed making kindling of a packing box" members of the congregation announced, "'Surely this isn't necessary, Mrs. Bentley - your position in the community - and Mr. Bentley such a big, able-bodied man - '" (3). Mrs. Bentley again draws scornful attention to this emphasis on appearances when she writes about the dinner at the Finleys' to which she and Philip have been invited. She notes that it is "hard to keep our parson manners uppermost" and then explains that "parson manners" require "eating with a heartiness that compliments your hostess, at the same time with a reluctance that attests your absorption in the things of the spirit" (6). Mrs. Bentley also draws attention to the fact that a precise standard has been set up for her own entertaining. Writing about the reciprocal dinner that must be arranged for the Finleys, she states, "Ours, of course, a simple, unpretentious meal, for of such must be the household of a minister of God" (6). Mrs. Bentley recounts some

of her past experiences with such meals:

> Even when you have money it's hard sometimes to know what you ought to do. For a plain meal once in Crow Coulee I earned the reputation of being a shiftless housewife; and another time, when I went to more expense, I set our guests talking all over town about my extravagance that they were paying for. (39)

She points out that the exchange of meals between Main Street hostesses and the parson and his wife has reached the level of a pagan rite in which even common sense and the welfare of the hostess's own family are laid on the altar:

> ...the formal dinner of a Main Street hostess is invariably good. Good to an almost sacrificial degree. A kind of rite, at which we preside as priest and priestess - an offering, not for us, but through us, to the exacting small-town gods Propriety and Parity.
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> Mrs. Finley, for instance: she must have spent hours preparing for us, cleaning her house, polishing her cut glass and silver - and if I know anything at all about Main Street economics she'll spend as many more hours polishing her wits for ways and means to make ends meet till next allowance day. (6)

Much as she scorns the forms of Main Street Christianity, it is evident that Mrs. Bentley has begun to impose these same forms and rituals on her life. She worries that she has not yet repaid Mrs. Finley's hospitality, and although she and Philip have so scant a store of groceries that he has to approach Mr. Finley and ask for his salary, Mrs. Bentley sacrifices a can of salmon to the code of propriety she believes is demanded of her. She writes, "There's the dinner, too, that we owe the Finleys still.... Every time I meet Mrs. Finley I imagine her eyes are saying

When?" (39). Sandra Djwa says of the Main Street code of "Christian" behaviour that

> this 'well-bred Christianity' is form without spirit, the false front of a behaviour without belief; it is a modern form of paganism in which the forms or conventions of a faith are perverted into a substitution for faith itself.[12]

What may have begun as worship of the Christian God has been changed by the Main Street Christians into worship of mere social convention, what Djwa calls "the Puritan false gods of behaviourism - the mechanical acts of behaviour which remain after the true religious spirit has gone out of the action."[13]

More disturbing than the forms of social behaviour that bind the residents of Horizon and other small towns is the religious form that inhibits worship there. When Mrs. Bentley writes about Miss Twill's visit to the Bentley home she says, presumably paraphrasing the choir director's words,[14]

> All the musicians in the town, it seems, are a backsliding lot, who want strange new hymns that nobody knows at an ungodly pace that nobody can keep up with. In Miss Twill's choir they sing the old hymns, slowly. (3)

With this statement, Mrs. Bentley points out a very real

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[12]Djwa, "No Other Way" 55.

[13]Djwa, "No Other Way" 56.

[14]In contrast with Mrs. Bentley's earlier supposition regarding Miss Twill's opinion of the Bentleys and their piano, the words "it seems" indicate that, in this instance, Miss Twill has, in fact, voiced her ideas about the town's musicians and their attitude toward the traditional hymns.

problem in Main Street Christianity. Its proponents are bound by tradition and the old ways of doing things. The pace at which their concepts of faith and worship change and grow is, indeed, slow, and they refuse to bring their religion up to date and make it relevant to the modern world.

Literal belief in every aspect of Old Testament Scripture is an issue of major importance in Horizon. Mrs. Bentley draws attention to this when she writes, "This is a fundamentalist town. To the letter it believes the Old Testament stories that we, wisely or presumptuously, choose to accept only as tales and allegories" (111). Although the residents of the town cling to the absolute truth of Scripture, their lives seem to be no more fruitful and joy-filled than the lives of the disbelieving Bentleys. Mrs. Bentley says of Philip that he will not "impose the Bible on Steve [their foster son] literally....because in his own words it means committing the boy to bigotry" (111-12), an opinion that seems to be confirmed as readers observe the details of life in Horizon. Clearly, there must be more to living a fulfilled Christian life than simply believing in the miraculous events recorded in the Old Testament.

Although Mrs. Bentley writes deprecatingly of the church members' desire to hold on to form and tradition, it becomes evident that, just as she has become bound by the social dictates she has observed in the small-town churches, her husband is bound by the forms of worship he has

observed. Miss Twill tells Philip, "'Other ministers we've had have considered the musical part of the service rather important. Of course, if it doesn't matter to you whether the hymns are in keeping with the text or not - '" (3). One may read in Miss Twill's words a pride in her own importance as a contributor to the service, but she also makes the valid point that the service should be an entity in which all the parts combine logically to lead the congregation into worship of their God. Philip, however, does not seem to have grasped this point. Mrs. Bentley is correct in her prediction that, no matter what components, musical or otherwise, the Horizon service may include, Philip will preach the same sermon "he always preaches...on his first Sunday" (3-4). In confirmation of her assumption, the sermon in question is that evening "spread out on the little table by the bed" (4). It does not constitute a fresh message from the Lord but is, rather, a tired oration so often repeated that Mrs. Bentley can easily come up with the hymns that will suit it:

> It's a stalwart, four-square, Christian sermon. It nails his colors to the mast. It declares to the town his creed, lets them know what they may expect. The Word of God as revealed in Holy Writ - Christ Crucified - salvation through His grace.... (4)

There is nothing wrong with the concepts about which Philip preaches. They, in fact, constitute the backbone of the Gospel message. There is no power, however, in what Lorraine York calls "the staid, prearranged sermon which

Philip perfunctorily delivers."[15] She notes that such a sermon "is less a verbal meditation than a defiant gesture."[16]

Sandra Djwa notes, "Ostensibly, the 'way' of As For Me and My House is the Christian way indicated by the title. But this structure is steadily undercut through the central metaphor of the 'false-front'...."[17] The false fronts to which Mrs. Bentley often refers are the false upper stories added to buildings in prairie towns to make the buildings appear more impressive and the towns more affluent than they are. In choosing to use the image of the false front throughout this text, Ross is once again, as he did with the use of an unreliable narrator, pointing out the need to discover and implement truth in one's life. Mrs. Bentley says of these false fronts that they "ought to be laughed at, never understood or pitied" (4). She and the other characters in this novel, however, erect similar false fronts in their practice of Christianity and in their dealings with others. Djwa states:

> The false-fronts of the novel - first introduced in relation to the false facades of the little Main Street stores - modulate into the psychological "false-front" or persona, that Jungian term used to describe the protective surface

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[15]Lorraine York, "'Its Better Nature Lost': The Importance of the Word in Sinclair Ross's 'As For Me and My House,'" Canadian Literature 103 (Winter 1984): 172.

[16]York 175.

[17]Djwa, "No Other Way" 54.

behind which the real self is hidden.[18]

As already observed, the women of the town hide their lack of Christian love behind a round of social events and concern for evidences of good breeding and propriety. The townsfolk hide their lack of a relationship with God behind forms and traditions of religion. Mrs. Bentley plays at being a parson's wife while seething against the role in which she finds herself, and she claims a similar false exterior for her husband. Both Bentleys raise false fronts in their personal lives so that one can never understand the private thoughts of the other.

The false fronts erected by the people of Horizon and other small, fundamentalist towns include the traditional male and female roles that the citizens of such towns are required to adopt. Mrs. Bentley claims that she can "use the pliers and hammer twice as well" (3) as Philip, but "on calling days, it simply isn't done" (3) because such actions will invoke the wrath of those who subscribe to conventional concepts of propriety. Caught within the very code of proper behaviour she scorns, she looks on enviously as Joe Lawson stands up to his wife:

> But she [Mrs. Lawson] likes being exasperated with him....What woman doesn't like being exasperated with a man and finding that he pays no heed, pitting herself against him, and finding him too strong for her? (20)

Mrs. Bentley does not realize, though, that for a woman of

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[18]Djwa, "False Gods" 44.

her capability and intelligence, such stolid masculine dominance would be intolerable. Mrs. Bentley has attempted to make submission to a man the basic purpose of her life: "Submitting to him [Philip] that way, yielding my identity - it seemed what life was intended for" (16). She has found, however, that neither she nor Philip have experienced satisfaction in such an alliance. The relationship Mrs. Bird claims to have with her husband also raises questions about the worth of the traditional male-dominated society. Mrs. Bird tells Mrs. Bentley,

> "Intellectually, you see, the doctor and I are alone here. Provincial atmosphere - it suffocates. The result is it's always a man's world I live in. The dominating male - you'll understand when you meet the doctor." (21)

By creating a narrator who is capable of intelligently managing the practical aspects of life for the Bentley family, a process, readers are led to believe, that Philip could not adequately handle, Ross may be pointing out the fault in the traditional Judeo-Christian thinking that puts forward the idea that a man is more capable of leadership than is a woman, simply because he is a male. Philip is not at all happy with the stereotypical male role into which he is frequently squeezed by those around him. Mrs. Bentley tells her readers that for Philip, working with tools "always spoils a day" (70). He does not enjoy shingling the roof and connecting stovepipes, and yet the members of his congregation expect him to be a handyman who can cheerfully

and competently handle these chores:

> There's never been a leak before, Mrs. Finley told me this afternoon...."Only last week we papered this room for you...Only last week, and it's worse now than before we touched it. I don't know when we'll be able to do the ceiling over for you. Couldn't your husband get up on the roof and put a few new shingles on?" (5)

Such stereotyping only makes Philip feel bitter and lessens his sense of self-worth.

Mrs. Bentley is no more comfortable with the role that has been imposed upon her than is Philip with his. Not only does such stereotyping on the basis of sex deny her the freedom to break up packing cases and carry water for her own garden, it condemns her to a feeling of failure because she has not fulfilled her supposed function as a woman and given Philip a child. She refers to herself as a "broodless old woman" (4), thus defining her worth, or rather her perceived lack of it, in terms of her inability to bear children, and she writes that she "wished for a son again, a son that I might give back a little of what I've taken from him, only postponed to another generation his fulfillment" (5). Mrs. Bentley is an attractive woman, as proven by Paul's attentions to her. She is a competent musician and a good financial manager. Still, traditional thinking that child-bearing is a woman's chief function has convinced Mrs. Bentley that she is inadequate and a failure.

Mrs. Bentley has also succumbed to the idea that a woman, merely because of her sex, is somehow worth less than

a man. She explains in her diary,

> I kept suggesting that there was still my world, kept trying to draw him [Philip] into it, but he was too strong for me. His own world was shattered and empty, but at that it was better than a woman's. (64)

She states,

> I've seen it in him often before, a deep, uncontrollable aversion to any household task ordinarily performed by a woman, and I know it would rouse a loathing in him if he had to be my nurse. (121)

These statements and many others like them may, at least in part, be the result of mere assertions by Mrs. Bentley about how Philip feels, but they do reveal her own sense of her lack of worth and that she firmly believes in traditional roles for men and women:

> ...there was fear, a kind of instinct, that if I let him know he had hurt me he would withdraw even further than before. For a man I think is like that. Where a woman is concerned he likes to be able to respect himself, feel chivalrous, superior. If instead I make him feel guilty he'll hold a grudge against me for it, stand off wary. (65)

Margaret Laurence rightly designates such stereotypical concepts as "impossible and cruel standards."[19]

Such stereotyping on the basis of sex is as outdated, Ross seems to say, as are the religious forms with which the residents of Horizon burden themselves. The public roles adopted by the men and women in this novel are proven false again and again. Mrs. Bentley can use the pliers in secret,

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[19]Laurence 12.

and the women of the Horizon Ladies Aid, rather than being the helpless females of traditional thought, exert a great deal of influence on the men of the town. Mrs. Bentley writes about "the unspoken edict of the Ladies Aid that every man turn out [to their sale] to buy a doily" (156). Speaking of Steve's father and the woman who lived with him, Mrs. Wenderby states, "'We women should have run them out long ago'" (49), implying that the women are in actuality, if not in outward appearance, the governing force in Horizon.

Given the extensive use of Scriptural allusions and references in this text, it does not seem illogical to suppose that in his concern about male and female stereotyping Ross may have had in mind the words of the apostle Paul: "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). This and other similar passages of Scripture have often been used by those claiming to be Christians to justify the subjugation of women by men. Paul does state that the husband is to be the head of the wife, but only when Christ is head of the husband, guiding his actions. It cannot be denied that Paul places wives in a secondary role. Paul's thinking, however, is based on the social standards of his time and of the strictly patriarchal Jewish culture in which he was raised. As well, Paul's writings confirm that he was very concerned that the members

of the early Church should conduct themselves in an orderly fashion,[20] and thus, he considered it necessary to set out a marriage hierarchy to insure that a particular person should be designated as being in charge in each home so that order would be maintained in the Church and also in the homes represented there. The apostle's main point, however, a point reinforced by other statements in his epistles,[21] is that both men and women should be servants of God and of each other so that they may be "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). Paul's words do not constitute, as has sometimes been thought, a call for male domination and superiority. Since the apostle calls for a marriage relationship in which both partners serve Christ, and since the Christ of the Gospels is not the head of the homes in As For Me and My House, the hierarchy prescribed by Paul becomes invalid. The Bentleys and the people in the churches in which they serve have long ago abandoned the spiritual truth as well as the historical basis on which Paul's words are founded. Still, these people continue to cling to belief in the roles to which they think they have been called. Once again, the form of the belief persists, even though the spirit of it is gone. Ross seems to be saying that the

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[20]See Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 14:33: "For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

[21]See, for example, Ephesians 5:21 where Paul calls for all the members of the early church to "[submit] to one another in the fear of God."

characters in this novel need to look more deeply into the true meanings of Scripture instead of basing their lives on half-truths. There is no harm in Mrs. Bentley using the pliers and hammer. The harm comes when persons become so immersed in stereotypical thinking that individual qualities and traits are ignored in favour of dead claims about proper behaviour. The characters in this text will be unable to form healthy relationships either with other men and women or with God until the false fronts behind which they hide their true selves can be discarded.

There is so much emphasis on religious form in the small-town churches depicted in this novel that the church members have not learned to live with each other in the loving relationship called for in the Gospels. Christ proclaimed the second greatest commandment to be: "'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'" (Matt. 22:39), but Mrs. Bentley draws attention to the pettiness and jealousies that exist among the members of the Ladies Aid. She tells, for instance, how the women who bring soup and jelly to their sick pastor resent the "favoritism" (34) shown by Philip in trying a bowl of Mrs. Pratt's soup. Readers might suspect that Mrs. Bentley is interpreting the reactions of these women according to her own prejudices, but later on she gives evidence that jealousy and spite are, in fact, frequently displayed by the women in the Ladies Aid. She reports that Mrs. Bird and Mrs. Finley quarrel about ster-

ilizing dishes at a tea and tells about Mrs. Holly who "insists that in one scene [of a play] anyway she wear her new blue taffeta" only to be called a "Jezebel" (143) by Mrs. Finley.

It is true that many of the remarks made to Mrs. Bentley by the townspeople may be merely tactless, Mrs. Bentley herself being the one to construe them in hurtful ways. For example, when Mrs. Wenderby looks at Mrs. Bentley's "poor old curtains" and says there are "better ones in her rag bag" (3) that the pastor's wife can have, she may merely be making an awkward and badly phrased attempt at kindness. It is much harder, however, to cast a charitable light on the comment, remembered by Mrs. Bentley, of a caller who quenched the Bentleys' joy over having a dog by saying that "With crops so poor...[they] were fortunate to be able to afford a pet" since "Most of the people in town [found] it hard enough to manage just for themselves" (82). According to Mrs. Ellingson, acts of spite are not limited to the Main Street laity. Mrs. Bentley records her story of "'The last preacher [in Horizon who] had some beans and peas...and he was so mad because [Mrs. Ellingson's] chickens scratched them out he wouldn't speak to [her]'" (67).

In some cases, what Mrs. Bentley does not say is as important as what she says. As a woman in contact with church members but without the consolation of the Gospel

message, Mrs. Bentley is greatly in need of practical expressions of Christian concern. There is, however, no word at all about care shown toward her the year she suffered the pain of having a stillborn baby. Mrs. Bentley has, for the most part, seen only one side of Main Street Christianity. These nominal Christians apparently know very little about translating their faith into action.

The lack of love and understanding evident in these and other instances is instrumental in making the Church as it is depicted in As For Me and My House an institution for the elect not of God, but of humankind. On her first Sunday in Horizon, Mrs. Bentley notes that "Miss Twill and the matrons ...don't quite approve of [Judith West]" (11), the young girl from the sandhills who serves in the Wenderby home. She notes that "there was a tight-lipped silence for a minute when I remarked after service how well she [Judith] had sung her solo" (11). In this instance, Mrs. Bentley's perceptions are proven to be correct. Later, Judith tells Mrs. Bentley that when she first worked for Mrs. Finley and, excited by the train, went to the station to see it at night when it came in, "Mrs. Finley sent [her] home, with a letter to [her] father that she was afraid [Judith would] come to no good end" (57). Mrs. Bentley reports, "In summer she's [Judith's] been heard singing off by herself up the railroad track as late as ten o'clock at night. Naturally people talk" (12). There is no room for non-conformists in the

town of Horizon or in its church.

Mrs. Bentley also tells her readers that Philip has been a victim of the same kind of self-righteous snobbery that plagues Judith. Although she admits that she knows Philip's life "only in fragments," she states that prior to their marriage he did tell her "who he was and what he came from, his head set defiant, his voice quick and hard" (29). Philip is the illegitimate son of a waitress and a preacher/ artist, and according to Mrs. Bentley

> He had grown up feeling [the Church] hostile, a force aligned against him. In Sunday School, where they sent him regularly, he was tolerated, left on the edge of things.... Whatever it might profess, he soon found, the Church was for only the approved and respectable part of the town. Little Main Street churches, no bigger than their Main-Street-minded members, are like that sometimes, and a little Main Street church was the only one he knew....The very way they put their eyebrows up in Sunday School brought out his pride. They could deplore his bastardy no more than he despised their Main Street minds. (31)

When the Bentleys attempt to adopt Steve, the son of a shiftless, immigrant railway worker, religious discrimination is added to class consciousness in the list of the shortcomings of Main Street Christianity. Mrs. Bentley describes Horizon as "a bigoted Protestant town" (50), and support for her statement is found in her references to the suggestions of the townspeople that the Bentleys should refuse to adopt Steve and give preference to a child of "'[their] own kind - clean decent people'" because "'blood will out and Catholics never change'" (61). Sandra Djwa

writes,

> "Propriety," the well-bred Christianity which Mrs. Bentley cites, is the outer form of circumspect behaviour which replaces spontaneous action grounded in love; "Parity," social prestige, is the form of behaviour which results in the establishment of a village elect (notably the trinity of Mrs. Finley, Mrs. Bird, and Mrs. Bentley) and the exclusion of the damned (such as Judith and Steve) on grounds of social elitism rather than in terms of the true Christian love which results in brotherhood and justice.[22]

As a further accusation against Main Street Christianity, Mrs. Bentley points out that the churches in the small towns in which she and her husband have lived are not even honourable about paying their debts. According to Mrs. Bentley, most of these churches still owe the Bentleys substantial amounts of money. The accuracy of this statement is confirmed as, throughout the novel, cheques from former churches keep arriving at the Bentley home. These amounts are not forthcoming, however, until either Mrs. Bentley or Philip swallow their pride and write to request that the debts be paid. This situation has not improved with the Bentley's move to Horizon. Of Mrs. Finley Mrs. Bentley

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[22]Djwa, "No Other Way" 56.

Although Djwa includes Mrs. Bentley in the trinity of the elite, and Mrs. Bentley herself says, "For such is the social hierarchy of a little town that despite her hats the minister's wife goes everywhere, meets everyone" (44), the code of propriety adhered to by the Main Street churches serves to keep Mrs. Bentley an outsider in the communities in which she and her husband serve. Ross never lets readers know his protagonist's Christian name, an indication, perhaps, that she is scarcely ever allowed to develop close friendships. She is, instead, forced to hide her real self behind a screen of correct behaviour and social position.

says, "She's fuming now in earnest...for Philip called on her this morning and explained the urgency of coal and grocery bills" (157). It is the irresponsibility of the members of these churches that, Mrs. Bentley says, causes her to "flare sometimes, ask why [she and Philip] can't live decently like other people" (9).

Out of Mrs. Bentley's description of Main Street Christianity emerges a picture of "smug," seemingly "self-sufficient" (99-100) little Main Street churches with scarcely any conception of their need for God. Mrs. Bentley comments on "the wraith of a smell" that seems "to haunt [the parsonage] with a vague suggestion of musty shelves, repression and decay" (12). She claims that as a result of her attempt to make a festive supper, "the smell, the faint old exhalation of the past... seemed sharper, more insistent...trying to tell me that [the parsonage] is a house of silence and repression and restraint" (58). Mrs. Bentley later admits that the catalyst for the smell is the weather. During a stormy night she writes, "It's raining again, and the roof's leaking, and in musty whiffs I smell the past again" (161). No matter what its physical cause, however, this is the odour of Main Street Christianity, a dead religion filled with inhibitions and based on outdated systems of thought.

It is little wonder that, having observed the church-goers in a number of small towns, Mrs. Bentley's view of

Christianity has become as narrow and closed as the views of the small-town citizens she hates. She sees the Horizon church building itself as "black even against the darkness, towering ominously up through the night and merging with it" (5). Rather than being a combined force of light and strength as they were intended to be, the Church and the Christianity it embodies are, in Mrs. Bentley's estimation, threatening and dark. Mrs. Bentley describes a sketch Philip has made of "a congregation as he sees it from the pulpit," and in her description readers can discern the bitterness she and, presumably, Philip feel toward the members of the Main Street congregations they have encountered:

> Seven faces in the first row - ugly, wretched faces, big-mouthed, mean-eyed - alike, yet each with a sharp, aggressive individuality - the caricature of a pew, and the likenesses of seven people. Seven faces more in the second row - just the tops of them. Seven until they merged - brief, hard pencil flecks, nothing more, but each fleck relentless, a repetition of the fleck in front of it, of the seven faces in the front row, of all that he saw there contemptible and mean. (17)

For Mrs. Bentley, the drawing embodies the form and rigidity of organized Christianity that she despises. In the faces of this congregation she sees everything that is hard and cruel in human nature, that side of men and women that, Mrs. Bentley has observed, the dead Christianity of Main Street has been unable to soften or change.

In order to survive in such a restrictive setting, Mrs.

Bentley and, she believes, Philip with her have adopted a hypocritical stance by means of which they pretend to be firm in a faith that they have long since abandoned, if indeed it ever existed. When Mrs. Bird comes to call and tells Mrs. Bentley that although he is "'Capable of anything, anywhere,'" Dr. Bird serves Horizon because it needs him, Mrs. Bentley is ready with a standard religious bromide: "'It will be made up to him though,' the parson's wife remembered to say. 'It always is'" (21). Mrs. Bentley again makes claim to this kind of hypocrisy when she describes her Scriptural defence of the Bentleys' adoption of Steve:

> So I parried them [the townspeople of Horizon], cool and patient, piety to my finger tips. It was the devil quoting scripture maybe, but it worked....I'm not so thin-skinned as he [Philip] is anyway. I resigned myself to sanctimony years ago. Today I was only putting our false front up again, enlarged this time for three. (61)

The Bentleys' hypocrisy is epitomized by the "shingle" Philip faithfully hangs out in each new town: "As For Me and My House - The House of Bentley - We Will Serve the Lord" (61).

Rather than helping the situation, however, the adoption of a hypocritical stance simply takes the Bentleys farther than ever away from the Christianity of the Gospels. Mrs. Bentley's efforts to hide her feelings and thoughts from the town and from Philip serve to foster in her a kind of pride. Laurence Ricou asserts, "She is delighted, almost

proud, to be called on again and again to outwit the congregation and keep the mask of piety intact."[23] Mrs. Bentley's pride is also evident when Philip and Steve go to make pastoral calls in the country, leaving her alone. She tells her readers, "I laughed as I told him [Steve] I had other things to do, thinking how strong it was of me, even with such sudden ruin all around, to be so self-effacing and restrained" (63). Pride in her ability to practise restraint leads, however, to even more confusion in the relationship between the Bentleys. As the Bible predicts it will, such pride brings about disastrous consequences.[24]

As well as fostering pride, the hypocrisy practised by the Bentleys also serves as an instrument of further alienation from the communities in which they serve. Mrs. Bentley sees the hypocrisy she and Philip share as a bond that protects them against the towns in which they live. She says of the time when Philip smoked a pipe in opposition to the proprieties of Main Street:

> It was easier when Philip smoked. The silences were less strained, the study door between us less implacable. The pipe belonged to both of us. We were partners in conspiracy.... together like that for a while we would get the better of the day....I used to feel myself a match for all the Main Streets in the world. (14)

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[23]Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1973) 84.

[24]See Proverbs 16:18:
Pride goes before destruction,
And a haughty spirit before a fall.

Mrs. Bentley acquaints her readers with the methods she and Philip use to manage the leading members of their congregations: "...we have a little technique. Philip will sometimes have them help pick out the hymns, and I'll ask Mrs. Finley about arranging the furniture in our living-room" (6). About her need to put some distance between herself and Philip Mrs. Bentley says, "There's the town, of course, but I can't join in" (43).

If hypocrisy provides few solutions to the problems of Main Street Christianity, neither is the answer to be found in attempts to adhere strictly to one's moral convictions. According to Mrs. Bentley, this is what Philip tries to do, and her diary is filled with instance after instance of the failure of such actions. Mrs. Bentley tells how Philip's covert smoking "wore at his self-respect till at last one night he flared, said that since he couldn't smoke in daylight like a man he wouldn't smoke at all" (14). The nervousness occasioned in Philip by his attempt to act in accordance with the Main Street code of ethics, however, makes him even more difficult to live with. Mrs. Bentley admits that she

> flared in turn, and said that so far as hypocrisy went the pipe didn't make much difference one way or another. It was no worse smoking on the sly than taking out his spleen and temper on his wife. (15)

In another example of Philip's attempts to act in accordance with his own code of honourable conduct, readers may admire

the facet of his character that makes it difficult for him to ask previous churches for the portions of his salary they still owe him. According to Mrs. Bentley, Philip thinks he does not deserve to be paid these arrears because "he feels he doesn't belong in the Church" (9). Readers can, however, readily see the impossibility of feeding and clothing two adults with promises and ideals. Mrs. Bentley also points out the failure of Philip's moral approach to fiction writing: "...instead of trying to make his story popular and salable, he pushed it on somberly the way he felt it ought to go" (33). She adds simply, "It was a failure, of course, and it exhausted him" (33).

One result of a too strict adherence to moral codes can be the emergence of a sense of guilt like that which is evident in As For Me and My House. Mrs. Bentley claims that Philip is racked with guilt. She writes that he has "a guilty feeling that he ought to mean everything he says" (4), and she notes that "he's not a strong or great man, just a guilty one....His guilt is that emphatically he does not believe. His disbelief amounts to an achievement" (18).

Whatever the degree of validity in Mrs. Bentley's claims about Philip, it is certain that she reveals her own feelings of guilt throughout the text. Mrs. Bentley feels guilty because she believes she has, by marrying Philip, altered the course of his life so that he cannot be free to pursue his career as an artist. Blaming herself, she

insists, "For these last twelve years I've kept him in the Church - no one else" (107). To what extent Mrs. Bentley is really responsible for the Bentleys' situation is unclear, but certainly Philip could have rebelled against her maneuverings at some point in their relationship. There is a great deal of truth in Philip's response to Mrs. Bentley's apology for hindering him: "'If a man's a victim of circumstances he deserves to be'" (119). D. J. Dooley observes that

> since her husband will take no initiative...she [Mrs. Bentley] has virtually no option [but to take control of the Bentleys' situation]. The choices she makes are in accordance with her husband's unexpressed wishes, to the extent that she comprehends them.[25]

Practising what Evelyn Hinz and John Teunissen call a "fundamentalist guilt-for-a-guilt morality,"[26] Mrs. Bentley is quick to suppose that Philip accuses her of a relationship with Paul in order to ease the guilt he feels about his affair with Judith: "Guilty himself, is his impulse to find me guilty too?...Is he trying to bring us to a level where we must face each other as two of a kind?" (135). There is the possibility that Mrs. Bentley is acting in a similar way with respect to the hypocrisy she claims for Philip. It is often unclear whether Philip's hypocrisy and the guilt he

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[25]Dooley 41.

[26]Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen, "Who's the Father of Mrs. Bentley's Child?: 'As For Me and My House' and the Conventions of Dramatic Monologue," <u>Canadian Literature</u> 111 (Winter 1986): 106.

feels about it are as great as she says or whether she merely wants a partner who can share in her experience of these things.

Ross encourages readers to look closely at Mrs. Bentley's statements on the subject of guilt and determine how much of this feeling is deserved and how much is falsely assumed. As observed earlier, guilt has often been thought to be a product of a harsh religion based on Calvinist dictates, and Ross asks his readers to examine the subject more fully. Deserved guilt may be a valuable emotion, but false guilt is crippling and serves to deaden those who carry it with them. The Bentleys' marriage demonstrates this. Those who bear such guilt have a real need to understand and implement the ideas expressed in Philip's initial sermon: "Christ Crucified - salvation through His Grace" (4). They need the Saviour of the New Testament to relieve them of their guilt and allow them to escape from its smothering influence.

Although Mrs. Bentley believes that she wants nothing to do with Christianity and its teachings, she finds this belief being challenged as time goes on. When the Bentleys visit Paul's brother's ranch, Mrs. Bentley is made aware how much her sham role of pious minister's wife has become a reality:

> He [Philip] can't make the cowboys forget he's a preacher, and at mealtimes they all look awkward and uncomfortable. For so many years he's spoken only when he's had something to say that his

> attempts now to be conversational make him sound like a priggish young evangelist. I find myself a little the same way too at times. I speak or laugh, and suddenly in my voice catch a hint of the benediction. It just means, I suppose, that all these years the Horizons have been working their will on me. My heresy, perhaps, is less than I sometimes think. (93)

A number of Mrs. Bentley's diary entries reveal that she has begun, tentatively, to search for a kind of Christianity that will meet her needs. Looking at Philip's drawing of a "trim, white, neat-gabled little schoolhouse" standing "lonely and defiant on a landscape like a desert" (80), Mrs. Bentley writes, "You see it the way Paul sees it....it's Humanity in microcosm. Faith, ideals, reason - all the things that really are humanity" (80). The faith and ideals that Mrs. Bentley feels are the essence of human existence also lie at the heart of Christianity as it is presented in the Gospels. In her comment, Mrs. Bentley seems to betray a longing for the presence of such "faith" and "ideals" in the empty life she leads.

When prayers are made for rain at Partridge Hill, Mrs. Bentley again betrays a wistful longing for proof that meaningful faith does, in fact, exist: "...for the first time I wished that Philip could mean his prayers, reach out and comfort a little" (83). At Peter Lawson's funeral she again wishes "that Philip could preach a sermon with more comfort and conviction in it" (108). When, following the prayers for rain, Mrs. Bentley and Paul discuss the belief and trust that have sustained the Partridge Hill congregation through

five years of drought, Mrs. Bentley wavers from absolute rejection of faith in God: "Surely it must be a very great faith that such indifference on the part of its deity cannot weaken - a very great faith or a very foolish one. Paul and I are tied on it" (84).

Sitting with Philip following his completion of the painting of "The hills and river and driftwood logs" (102), Mrs. Bentley muses about the gradual emergence in her life of at least a degree of belief:

> Perhaps it's been his own sermons Sunday by Sunday, the accepted, orthodox way he'd had to talk about a watchful Almighty who plans for and leads us and lets nothing go astray. Perhaps all unknown to myself, the repetition has made me half-believe it. (102-03)

At Christmas, Mrs. Bentley openly acknowledges her desire for faith when she says that following the Christmas Eve service she "started home, wishing that on such an unearthly, radiant night I might be a little less of a rationalist, able to feel the ecstasy of Christmas" (148).

Writing about Mrs. Bentley's search for some kind of spiritual comfort, Lorraine York says that "one finds [in this novel] one solitary voice: the voice of Mrs. Bentley...the voice of the seeker."[27] Although it is Philip's struggle between hypocrisy and faith that Mrs. Bentley attempts to describe, the spiritual battle that emerges most clearly from the pages of her diary is her own.

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[27]York 168.

In the Christian tradition of which the Bentleys are a part, emphasis is placed on a personal relationship with one's God, and each individual is encouraged to "work out [his or her] own salvation" (Phil. 2:12) and to work toward his or her own understanding of God and his ways. The loneliness and isolation inherent in the struggle toward faith are evident as Mrs. Bentley describes the nights when Philip closes his study door against her and the solitary walks she takes along the railroad tracks. Gail Bowen writes,

> Ross' fiction is characterized by a certain tension. His heroes, young, introspective, unsure, are engaged in what, for them, is a life and death struggle to bring some meaning to their own existence. They must operate in a world which they see at best as indifferent, at worst as hostile to their efforts. The very nature of their search demands that they be loners.[28]

In her comments about Philip's attempted novel, Mrs. Bentley says that there is "another reality, kindlier, that he's never seen or understood" (29), but describing Philip's attempts to paint on one of his "hard days" (101), she states,

> Reality as the rest of us know it, disappears from him....[It is] as if he pierces this workaday reality of ours, half scales it off, sees hidden behind it another. More important, more significant than ours, but that he understands only vaguely. He tries to solve it, give it expression, and doesn't quite succeed. (101)

The perception of "another reality" does seem to be part of Philip's thinking since he tells his wife, "'Religion and

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[28]Bowen 47.

art....They're both a rejection of the material, common-sense world for one that's illusory, yet somehow more important'" (112). It is evident, however, that Mrs. Bentley also subscribes to this idea for she is the one who several times puts the concept into words. She yearns to experience a reality that can transcend the limited forms and traditions of Main Street Christianity. Sometimes, as when she states that Philip seeks "a beauty and significance that isn't life's to give" (94), she seems about to abandon the search to bitterness and despair. She does not, however, entirely give up her quest to find active proof of the existence of the God of love and compassion about whom Philip preaches and that other reality that He supposedly embodies.

Although Mrs. Bentley finds the kind of Christianity practised in Horizon and its sister towns intolerable, this is not the only form of faith with which she is presented. As For Me and My House contains a wide range of Christian adherents, as well as some who choose to completely reject Christianity in all its forms.

The first Sunday the Bentleys go to Partridge Hill, they meet the professed atheist Paul Kirby. Paul tells the Bentleys, "'Not that I'm at all a religious man....I wouldn't want to give you a false impression'" (8). In his quick admission of his true feelings about Christianity, Paul demonstrates the honesty and integrity that are often miss-

ing from Main Street churches and their members. Paul, however, continues to accompany the Bentleys to Partridge Hill Sunday after Sunday, although he is unable to explain his reasons for doing so. In June, he finally asks them if they "ever wonder why he went so regularly to church" (84). Having asked him to explain the reasons for his attendance, Mrs. Bentley notes that "instead of answering he only made out a case for staying away" (84). In answer to Mrs. Bentley's logical assumption, "'You won't be coming then any more - ,'" Paul responds in a most illogical way: "'I didn't mean that - quite the contrary...'" (84). Paul's actions do not seem to support his claim not to believe. Readers may be aware that Paul's reason for accompanying the Bentleys to church each Sunday is that he wants to spend more time with Mrs. Bentley, but she does not understand this fact. Thus, Paul's "case for staying away" lacks credibility for her. Any discussions she might have with the schoolteacher about the relative values of Christianity and atheism are likely to end, like the discussion about the faith of the residents of Partridge Hill, in a tie.

Mrs. Bird and her doctor husband also provide spiritual examples for Mrs. Bentley. Mrs. Bird tells her neighbour that "'the doctor's such a scientific man he'd never tolerate the word [spiritual]'" (22). She herself is a member of the Ladies Aid and enthusiastically takes part in its plays and sales, but she confides to Mrs. Bentley, "'Ordinarily I

don't have much to do with them. But if you can stand them so can I'" (22). Mrs. Bentley's first reaction to Mrs. Bird is unenthusiastic. Mrs. Bird, however, claims cultural and spiritual kinship with Mrs. Bentley:

> "How nice," said the parson's wife appropriately, "that you and the doctor have so much in common."
> "No more than you and I, my dear. The first night you played the organ here - 'Manna, Josephine,' I said. 'Positively manna. You must go and tell her so. She'll understand - speak your own language.' Once, you know, I was a musician too." (22)

Mrs. Bentley can only respond to Mrs. Bird's overtures with what "must have been a sickly smile" (22). At this point in the novel, Mrs. Bird may indeed seem to be a rather silly and pretentious woman as she quotes sentimentally, "'Oh to be in England, now that April's there,/ And whoever wakes in England'" (21), even though she admits that she is not English. She does not show herself to better advantage in her dealings with the members of the Ladies Aid. Describing the play put on by the women Mrs. Bentley writes,

> In the last act Mrs. Bird spends five minutes dying. Mrs. Finley thinks it could be speeded up to three, but Mrs. Bird took elocution lessons once, and with a tide of bosom says that art is long and Mrs. Finley just a small-town Philistine. (143)

It is only when Mrs. Bird abandons her dealings with the Main Street Christians that she shows the compassion and concern for another that is a hallmark of the Christian faith as it is presented in the Gospels. When Mrs. Bentley knows her better, she is able to say of Mrs. Bird, "She's

the only one in town I feel safe with" (60). Mrs. Bird worries about Mrs. Bentley's health. She allows Mrs. Bentley to place catalogue orders in her name, thus freeing Mrs. Bentley from the necessity to shop in "the Horizon stores where [the Bentleys] are supposed to deal" (54). Mrs. Bird also offers Mrs. Bentley comfort in the matter of the Bentleys' attempted adoption of Steve. She tells Mrs. Bentley, "'The doctor insists it's environment, not heredity [that determines a child's personality], so when you hear what I've been hearing simply shut your ears'" (60). Finding Mrs. Bentley in tears, Mrs. Bird offers sympathy and advice: "'Clever men are always hard to live with....But you shouldn't distress him this way, letting him see you cry. He'll never forgive you for it'" (86). In her role as friend, confidante, and champion of Mrs. Bentley, Mrs. Bird is one of the first characters in the novel to demonstrate the Christianity of the Gospels. Like Paul, though, she is unable to be consistent in the practice of her beliefs. Consequently, her good deeds and thoughtfulness have less impact on Mrs. Bentley and her search for faith than they might otherwise have. It is worthy of note, however, that it is to Mrs. Bird, the wife of a professed atheist, that Ross attributes the actions characteristic of Gospel-based Christianity. It is she, rather than those Christians who profess to believe unequivocally, who has been able to incorporate at least some of the qualities of such

Christianity into her life.

The Reverend Downie and his wife are, like Paul and Mrs. Bird, visitors to the Bentley home. Lorraine York says that "the voice of conventional piety is embodied in Mrs. Downie, the stereotypic clergyman's wife who visits the Bentleys along with her conventional mate."[29] Reverend and Mrs. Downie are representatives of a serene and placid faith. Mrs. Bentley says of Reverend Downie, "He said a word of prayer for us and finished radiant" (82). The faith Reverend and Mrs. Downie embrace, however, has little practical application to the world in which the Bentleys find themselves. The Downies simply manage to live their lives in the spiritual realm, completely divorced from the problems that face the inhabitants of the land in which they minister. Mrs. Bentley notes that Mrs. Downie wears "a fussy beribboned hat too big for her that she has likely salvaged from a mission barrel" and "support[s] it so bravely, with...stalwart, meek assurance" (82). Mrs. Downie's voice, "like a teaspoon tinkling in a china cup" (82), evokes images of endless cups of tea and Ladies Aid meetings. The Downies are, as Mrs. Bentley says, "quaint" (82). They are reminders of another era when faith in God was unquestioned. Theirs is a faith that survives alongside, not in direct relation to, the everyday situations and problems encountered by people like the Bentleys and the

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[29]York 168.

members of their congregations.

Steve, too, practises a faith that is separate from the problems and concerns of the everyday world. Mrs. Bentley says of him,

> Steve meanwhile remains a good Roman Catholic. We buy him a horse, teach him to think, explain the Old Testament to him so well that in turn he explains it to Horizon - and all the time in his own faith he never falters.
>
> ...
>
> He doesn't feel his religion in any sense a duty; so far as we can see he has set himself no observances or prayers; but the religion itself, the emotional, instinctive part of it, it possesses him at times so completely that we and this fine young mind we are trying to help him build simply don't exist. (112)

Steve decorates the walls of his room with "a Sacred Heart lithograph of the Virgin Mary, and a little crucifix that he says used to belong to his mother" (52), and when Mrs. Bentley suggests replacing the picture of the Virgin with a picture of some horses, Steve's response is that he is "afraid that it wouldn't be right" (112). Steve's is a faith that can, however, be conveniently compartmentalized and put in use or disregarded at his convenience. Thus, when he goes back to his former home to get a table he wants, having kept aside one key when the house was locked so that it and its contents could be sold to pay his father's debts, his conscience does not trouble him at all. The everyday world and the world of religious observance are two separate realities in his life. Though readers who observe the Bentleys' encounter with Steve's simple faith

may be reminded of Christ's words, "'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it'" (Mark 10:15), Steve's kind of faith cannot provide the solutions to the problems the Bentleys face.

In some ways, the congregation of Partridge Hill forms the stronghold of faith in the novel, but the question is whether or not the faith practised by these country dwellers can be called strictly Christian. Mrs. Bentley says of their singing,

> There was strength in their voices when they sang, like the strength and darkness of the soil. The last hymn was staidly orthodox, but through it there seemed to mount something primitive, something that was less a response to Philip's sermon and scripture reading than to the grim futility of their own lives. (19)

This is, of course, another judgement on Mrs. Bentley's part, but because music is her field of expertise, it is reasonable to assume that she is more reliable here than in many other areas of her commentary. Later, during a windstorm, she has a chance to observe the congregation's reaction to Philip's sermon, and her initial impression seems to be confirmed:

> They were listening to the wind, not Philip.... From the organ I could see their faces pinched and stiffened with anxiety. They sat in tense, bolt upright rows, most of the time their eyes on the ceiling, as if it were the sky and they were trying to read the weather. (37)

The lives of these people are controlled by the weather and by the seasons, and it is possible to infer from the congre-

gation's inattention to Philip's preaching that they feel that the Word of God has little practical relation to their lives. The people of Partridge Hill bow to what Warren Tallman calls

> those gods who over-rule the [Canadian landscape] toward whom self quickens in its need to prevail ...such as preside over forests and open fields, mountains, prairies and plains: snow gods, dust gods, drought gods, wind gods, wolf gods - native to the place.[30]

Paul points out to Mrs. Bentley that the people of Partridge Hill are true "'pagans,'" a term that Paul defines as meaning "'country dwellers[s]'" (19).[31]

It is little wonder that the people of Partridge Hill feel the need to supplement their worship of the Christian God with worship of the land and its elements. In spite of yearly prayers for rain, it has been five years since a crop has been harvested. Even the ministrations of God's representatives are controlled by the seasons. Mrs. Bentley states, "Service at Partridge Hill during the winter is every other week, and only if the roads are clear, and the weather moderate" (139). She comments that "Through the long prayers for rain [Joe Lawson] sat with his eyes fixed

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[30]Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow: Part One: Four Windows on to Landscapes," Canadian Literature 5 (Summer 1960): 43.

[31]The fact that the Partridge Hill folk faithfully attend church services is no clear indication of where their faith lies. As noted, after meeting Mrs. Bentley, Paul, too, becomes a faithful churchgoer, although he reminds the Bentleys that his attendance at services has nothing to do with renewed faith.

straight in front of him" (83). Joe is an example of the farmers who find little comfort in conventional Christianity. It is unclear whether the people's concern with and reliance on the gods of the land and the elements have caused a "'jealous God'" (Exod. 20:5) to turn away from them or whether the apparent "indifference on the part of [the] deity" (84) has caused the people to turn away from traditional Christian worship. It is obvious, however, that a breach does exist and that there is a definite lack of communication between the Partridge Hill churchgoers and the Christian God.

Mrs. Bentley herself senses the presence of the elemental forces that govern the prairie. Of one of Philip's Main Street sketches she writes,

> Another little Main Street. In the foreground there's an old horse and buggy hitched outside one of the stores. A broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth it stands on, the prairie that continues where the town breaks off. What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle....The town shouldn't be there. It stands up so insolent and smug and self-assertive that your fingers itch to smudge it out and let the underlying rhythms complete themselves. (69)

During her first night in Horizon, Mrs. Bentley describes her feelings about the forces of nature with which she, along with the other prairie dwellers, is faced:

> It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness, little unilluminating glints that might be painted on it.

> The town seems huddled together, cowering on a high, tiny perch, afraid to move lest it topple into the wind....Above, in the high cold night, the wind goes swinging past, indifferent, liplessly mournful. It frightens me, makes me feel lost, dropped on this little perch of town and abandoned. (5)

Laurence Ricou says of this passage, "The surrounding immensity is almost overwhelming....It is as if the blackness of night is oblivion, with man placed uneasily at its edge, insignificant, and waiting to be reclaimed."[32]

During the Bentleys' stay on Stanley and Laura's ranch, their concern with the forces of nature becomes much more intense. Looking at Philip's numerous sketches of "Just the hills, the driftwood logs, and stunted trees," Mrs. Bentley sees in them "brooding over and pervading everything the same conviction of approaching dissolution that made it cold sometimes...out in the blazing sun" (100-01). In her own experiences at the ranch, Mrs. Bentley has "a queer sense of something cold and fearful, something inanimate, yet aware of us" (99). She finds that solitary walks are no longer comforting in this unfamiliar territory:

> When I rounded a point and looked back and couldn't see the fire I was afraid for a minute. The close black hills, the stealthy slipping sound the river made - it was as if I were entering dead, forbidden country, approaching the lair of the terror that destroyed the hills, that was lurking there still among the skulls. (95)
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> We've all lived in a little town too long. The wilderness here makes us uneasy....A Main Street is such a self-sufficient little pocket of

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[32]Ricou 83.

> existence, so smug, compact, that here we feel abashed somehow before the hills, their passiveness, the unheeding way they sleep....We shrink from our insignificance. The stillness and solitude - we think a force or presence into it - even a hostile presence, deliberate, aligned against us - for we dare not admit an indifferent wilderness, where we may have no meaning at all. (99-100)

Mrs. Bentley's words echo those of Paul when, following the Bentleys' first service at Partridge Hill, he attempted to explain "'the source of all religion'":

> "Man can't bear to admit his insignificance. If you've ever seen a hailstorm or watched a crop dry up - his helplessness, the way he's ignored - well, it was just such helplessness in the beginning that set him discovering gods who could control the storms and seasons. Powerful, friendly gods - on his side. And if they were more powerful than the storms, and if they were concerned with him above all things, then it followed that he was really more powerful and important than the storms, too." (19)

Mrs. Bentley is surrounded by a wide variety of religious thought and observance. In this novel, however, many of the believers have only "a form of godliness but [deny] its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). She does not find the comfort she needs in any of these forms of pseudo-Christianity.

The establishment and worship of false gods forms an important theme in As For Me and My House. The title of the novel is part of a statement made by Joshua in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Old Testament book that bears his name. After a long and bloody series of battles in which the Israelites had defeated many of the inhabitants of the land promised to them by God, Joshua called the tribes of Israel together at Shechem so that they could renew their

covenant with their Lord. After giving the historical details of God's past deliverance of the Israelites, Joshua admonished the people to "'fear the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD!'" (Josh. 24:14). Realizing, however, that the Israelites were surrounded by idol worshippers in the new land and that some might rebel against this admonition, Joshua offered them a choice:

> "And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD." (Josh. 24:15)

Just as the Israelites were surrounded by worshippers of idols, so the Bentleys find themselves in the midst of a people who revere the forms and traditions associated with religion rather than the God whom that religion was created to serve. Sandra Djwa writes that

> the supposedly Christian structure of the novel is ironically reversed. In Joshua, the source of the original quotation, a choice has been made by the Israelites. They have rejected the pagan gods of the Ammonites and chosen the true God, Jehovah. In the first chapters of Ross's novel, it would appear that the Bentleys have chosen the pagan gods.[33]

She also says,

> God's covenant given to Moses states that...the Israelites must guard themselves carefully from

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[33]Djwa, "No Other Way" 56

> the "images" of the pagans....This association of image or idol-worship with paganism is also suggested in [this book].[34]

Although Mrs. Bentley claims that both she and Philip hate the worship of religious and social conventions that is practised in Horizon, they do have their own idols that they carry with them. Thus, the Bentleys, along with the other residents of Horizon and possibly those of Partridge Hill, openly violate the first and second commandments given to Moses:

> "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself any carved image, or any likeness <u>of anything</u> that <u>is</u> in heaven above, or that <u>is</u> in the earth beneath, or that <u>is</u> in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, <u>am</u> a jealous God...." (Exod. 20:3-5)

While largely rejecting belief in the Christian or Jewish God, Mrs. Bentley has made a god of her very human husband. For him, she tells her readers, she has sacrificed her career as a pianist. In deference to his sensibilities, she does not practise the piano often, and when she does play, it is usually "with the soft pedal down, and somewhat furtively" (132). She says of her relationship with Philip, "I don't need any more. The hypocrisy and shabby clothes and small-town social round - none of it matters very much when he takes time off to be with me" (16). Mrs. Bentley realizes that she has become dependent on Philip for her very existence. About her current attitude to her music she

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[34] Djwa, "No Other Way" 57-58.

writes,

> ...it just isn't in me any longer. My fingers are wooden. Something's gone dead.
>
> That's what he's done to me, and there are times I can nearly hate him for it. I haven't roots of my own any more. I'm a fungus or parasite whose life depends on his. (151)

D. J. Dooley states,

> Mrs. Bentley's conscience is not guided by any religious creed, or by belief in God, or by belief in anything except Philip. Whatever his secret life may be, hers is a long process of torture, because she has put her whole faith in him.[35]

Mrs. Bentley's act of falling beside Philip and putting her arms around his knees in a plea for forgiveness for her part in a quarrel between them is symbolic of the adoration she gives her husband. This scene calls to mind similar demonstrations of humility and adoration found in Scripture, that, for instance, of the sinful woman who washed the feet of Christ with her tears and then dried them with her hair (Luke 7:37-38).

Mrs. Bentley's sins do not end with adoration of the Philip she met and married. She has also attempted to usurp the role of the Creator by trying to make Philip into the image she wants him to assume:

> There are...suggestions throughout the text that Mrs. Bentley has been raising up her own images, in particular that of Philip, the sensitive and impressionable artist who must be mothered along in the direction which she best sees fit.[36]

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[35]Dooley 43.

[36]Djwa, "No Other Way" 58-59.

When Philip finds Mrs. Bentley showing Mrs. Bird his sketches, he accuses her, "'You have to put in a word for me - impress them - let them see that your small-town preacher husband has more to him than they can see on the surface - '" (89), and it does seem that his accusation may be more correct than Mrs. Bentley will allow herself to admit. During a quarrel, she shouts at Philip that she "had ambition once too - and it was to be something more than the wife of a half-starved country preacher" (27).

Although Mrs. Bentley keeps claiming that Philip is an aspiring artist who desires to give himself to his art, there is little real basis for her claim in the events of the novel. Philip himself tells his wife that he is kept in the ministry by "the limitations of his hand and eye" (33). He is clever at sketching, but he cannot find the element missing from his drawing of the old horse on Main Street:

> Philip...could feel that there was something wrong, but he didn't know what. He kept giving last little touches here and there, as if it were just a matter of perspective, or a rounder buggy wheel. (69)

Philip's art is admired by Mrs. Bird and Laura and even Paul. Mrs. Bird is, however, entranced by anything that resembles culture, and in the case of Laura and Paul, it is usually the subjects of the pictures that intrigue them, Laura's horse, the little schoolhouse, the "hills and river and driftwood logs" that embody the "strength and fatalism" (102) of the prairie. Mrs. Bentley herself remarks of the

latter painting, "you can see he's a little clumsy still in oils" (102). In fact, there is little in Mrs. Bentley's account of Philip's work to indicate that, from an artistic point of view, there is anything truly remarkable in his efforts. Surely an artist with the talent and the artistic aptitude that Mrs. Bentley claims for her husband would use some of his considerable time alone to begin creating the masterpieces of which he is capable instead of just sketching little Main Streets.

Mrs. Bentley has previously observed that Mrs. Finley has a talent for molding others into the form she wants them to take:

> She's an alert, thin-voiced, thin-featured little woman, up to her eyes in the task of managing the town and making it over in her own image....The deportment and mien of her own family bear witness to a potter's hand that never falters. Her husband, for instance, is an appropriately meek little man, but you can't help feeling what an achievement is his meekness. (5)[37]

Mrs entley, however, fails to realize that the same tendency to control and recreate that she recognizes in Mrs. Finley has also become part of her own way of life.

Mrs. Bentley tells her readers that Philip has also

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[37]Jesus promised, "'Blessed are the meek,/ For they shall inherit the earth'" (Matt. 5:5). Mr. Finley's meekness is, however, a corruption of the quality spoken of in the Gospels. Rather than choosing be humble in the cause of Christ, he has allowed himself to be humbled by his wife. In doing so, Mr. Finley has not assured himself of a spiritual inheritance. He has, instead, sacrificed his own personality, one of his most important possessions, to the woman who has assumed the role of his creator.

raised up idols and false gods. She writes that his feelings about the father he never knew "became a kind of worship" (30). According to Mrs. Bentley, Philip is so devoted to the myth he has built around his father that, judging by a photograph he keeps of the man, he has even come to resemble his father physically. Mrs. Bentley states, "They say let a man look long and devotedly enough at a statue and in time he will grow to resemble it" (30). Philip's father was, according to Mrs. Bentley's account, "a young student preacher" (29) who had an "ambition to paint" (30). She says that among Philip's father's books were "letters to prove" (31) that he was unable to accept the religious beliefs that he had set out to preach. She also notes that his books were on "everything but theology" (31). Philip's choice of occupation mirrors his father's, and Philip's store of books, like his father's before him, consists, according to Paul, of "'Everything but theology'" (46). It is in imitation of his father's interest in art that Philip sketches constantly:

> Philip, like his New Testament prototype who asks, "Lord show us the Father and it sufficeth us," substitutes the image of an earthly father (the photograph) for a spiritual father and so succumbs to the worship of false gods.[38]

Mrs. Bentley notes that even Philip's image of his father has been created not accurately but in the image that pleases him most:

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[38]Djwa, "False Gods" 44.

> He was the son of this hero: that was some compensation, at least, for being the son also of a common waitress. In his taking sides it never seems to have occurred to him that if these two were really as he thought, then the moral responsibility for his existence could hardly have been where he placed it. (30)

Lorraine York draws attention to "This preference of Philip's for the visual icon, shorn of all encumbrances of historical detail or truth...."[39]

Philip's idolatry is not as single-minded as that of his wife. In her life, Philip is the one great idol before whom all other gods must bow. She tells her readers, however, that Philip makes an idol of his ideal image of his father and also of his dream of a son. During dinner at the Finleys', Mrs. Bentley observes Philip thinking, she believes, of "<u>his</u> boy. A fine, well-tempered lad by now strung just a little on the fine side, responsive to too many overtones" (6). She adds, "For I know Philip, and he has a way of building in his own image" (6).

Although Mrs. Bentley is often proven wrong in her assessments of Philip, she appears to be correct in her estimation of how much the idea of his own boy means to him. When a son for her husband does emerge in the person of Steve, the boy becomes the chief interest in Philip's life. Mrs. Bentley comments on the change in her husband's behaviour that is occasioned by Steve's arrival:

> This unexpected advent of a son, I must admit, has

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[39]York 167.

> brought a little life and enthusiasm to his face, taken some of the sag out of his shoulders....his step for the first time in years had a ring. There was eagerness and vitality radiating from him. (50)

Later, Mrs. Bentley writes that "there's a strange arrogance in his [Philip's] devotion to Steve, an unconscious determination to mold him in his own image" (112), and after Steve leaves the Bentleys, she speaks of him and Philip in terms of idol and worshipper:

> I wish, though, that Steve had gone differently, not quite so soon. Because in a little while Philip would have found him out, seen him plain, and then given me my turn again....An idol turned clay can make even an earthly woman desirable....Steve's away now, still firm on the pinnacle where Philip set him....He's one idol tarnish-proof. (119)

Philip has one more god whom he worships, perhaps unconsciously, and that is his wife. He has not recreated her in his image, but he has, it seems, allowed Mrs. Bentley to have a part in recreating him. It is, for instance, entirely possible that Mrs. Bentley's perceptions of her husband have shaped his personality. Because of the limited focus of the novel, it is difficult to determine the exact degree to which this has happened. Readers may, however, wonder if her constant assumptions that Philip is clumsy have not helped to make him that way. The awkward, inept Philip Mrs. Bentley describes is not the Philip who takes charge and shouts orders when Dawson's store catches fire. Mrs. Holly declares that "it was the first time she'd known them to get the hose working before the fire was out" (129).

Mrs. Bentley comments, "Paul was there too. It was his hands and Philip's head" (129). Still, as a long-time resident of Horizon, Paul had presumably been at other fires when the men couldn't make the hose work. The efficiency the men show at Dawson's store seems to be largely a result of Philip's capable efforts. Whatever Mrs. Bentley's part has actually been in keeping Philip in the Church, it is certain that Philip allows her to influence him in his departure from it. It is, after all, Mrs. Bentley who devises the scheme to save a thousand dollars and open a book and music store in the city. Philip's first solution to the Bentleys' problems is to write an article for a missionary magazine. He tells Mrs. Bentley, "'There's no harm anyway in keeping my name in front of them. It may mean a better church in a year or two, and a better salary. Somebody gets the good appointments'" (110).

Early in the novel, Miss Twill observes, "'People who are brought close to their Maker can't help feeling important'" (11). It is, however, very difficult for the Bentleys and the townsfolk of Horizon to come into that close relationship with their God or even to know who their "Maker" is for they have usurped the role of God and become creators. Often, they have taken the process one step further and have begun to worship the images and idols they have created. Mrs. Bentley and the citizens of Horizon are mistrustful of the crucifix and the picture of the Virgin

Mary that hang in Steve's room. These symbols of Roman Catholicism are, however, much less to be feared than are the images that are part of everyday life in Horizon.

Although many of the characters in this novel devote themselves to the worship of idols, most of these objects of worship fail them. D. G. Jones points out how useless the worship of form and tradition found in the Horizon church can be in the face of the harsh realities of the natural world that surrounds and sometimes invades the town:

> The more of nature one succeeds in excluding, the more formidable the enemy grows. Fear follows pride and leads to a renewed emphasis on the tangible symbols of one's faith, the ritual, doctrine, system with which it may be sustained. As the wind envelops the little church in Horizon, the congregation is filled with anxiety and is more than ever concerned to see that all the forms of the service are carried out to a nicety. To little avail.[40]

After giving herself completely to Philip, or at least to her image of what she wants Philip to be, Mrs. Bentley is finally forced to admit,

> ...the one I've always known hasn't been the real one. I've been a fool like him, just as credulous and blind. I've taken a youth and put him on a pedestal and kept him there. I've taken the extravagances of his boyish dreams and hungers and made a kind of aura of them, through which I've never seen the reality. So that now when he emerges from it into ordinary light I mustn't mind too much. It's just that he's been living all the while, growing, changing, maturing. I must remember, and be fair.
>
> We all change and grow. (135)

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[40]D. G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) 68.

This realization comes as a result of Philip's rebuke, "'Why not get your mind off Paul, and remember you're a married woman?'" (134); these words also cause Mrs. Bentley to wonder if because Philip has been unfaithful he is trying to find the same fault in her, thus making it necessary for them to "face each other as two of a kind" (135). If, as Mrs. Bentley asserts, "It just isn't true of the old Philip, the one I've always known" (135), Philip's accusation may indicate that the youthful idol Mrs. Bentley worships no longer even exists. Despite Philip's "solemn, almost selfless devotion" (111), Steve turns to Mrs. Bentley and her music. When he is finally taken from the Bentleys, the boy feels only excitement about the upcoming trainride, and when Philip does receive a letter from Steve, he is hurt "because it wasn't a warmer letter, with more of Steve in it" (127). The atheist Paul, by maintaining "'You can't ride a horse and feel altogether worthless, or be altogether convinced that society's little world is the last word'" (36), attempts to substitute a faith in horses for the faith in God to which he cannot subscribe. He, however, comes back from Stanley and Laura's ranch

> skeptical even of his theories that a boy ought to grow up alone with a horse. "Unless he intends staying among horses. He's not much good afterwards for getting along with people."
> He said it in a discouraged, helpless voice. (127)

The words that are so dear to Paul also fail him. His learned references to sex and his veiled declarations of

love mean little to Mrs. Bentley. It is not until the very end of the novel that Mrs. Bentley realizes that Paul does have romantic feelings for her, and then it is not his words but the "strained, helpless look in his eyes" (158) that reveals his love.

As readers watch the failure of idol after idol, it becomes evident that these man-made gods are not enough. There is a need in the lives of these characters for a meaningful faith and a powerful God in whom they can put their trust. Sandra Djwa writes that the "characters must learn to reject the false gods without before it is possible to find the true God within."[41]

The fictional world Ross creates in As For Me and My House is a fragmented world in which the search by the characters for completion and fulfillment is constant. As observed earlier, fragmentation and incompleteness are evident in the method of narration Ross has chosen to use in the novel. By making Mrs. Bentley's diary his narrative vehicle, Ross deliberately distorts the focus through which readers view events. In order to give a complete picture of what is taking place during this year in the Bentleys' lives, it would be necessary to present alternate views of each situation that would complement Mrs. Bentley's descriptions and opinions. By presenting readers with the diffi-

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[41]Djwa, "No Other Way" 54.

cult problem of trying to discover the objective truth behind his narrator's accounts Ross suggests the need for wholeness in his characters' perceptions of their world, their faith, and their God.

There is no wholeness in the Bentley marriage, and a gulf exists between Mrs. Bentley and Philip throughout most of the novel. The solitary evenings each spends are an indication that they have not been able to apply to their marriage the biblical ideal, "'...they are no longer two, but one'" (Matt. 19:6). Before the complex emotional problems raised in this novel can be effectively solved, Philip and Mrs. Bentley must, in accordance with Christian principles, be united mentally and spiritually into this "one" called for in the Gospels.

The division between art and religion imposed by Mrs. Bentley is another example of fragmentation. Although she insists that Philip's role as preacher is in direct opposition to his desire to be an artist, she herself says of her husband, "Sermon and drawing together, they're a kind of symbol, a summing up" (4). As often happens in this book, however, she does not seem to realize the implication behind her words. Philip tells his wife, "'Religion and art...are almost the same thing anyway. Just different ways of taking a man out of himself, bringing him to the emotional pitch that we call ecstasy or rapture'" (112). Philip's statement indicates that art may be his means of pursuing the same

kind of spiritual search upon which his wife has embarked. Mrs. Bentley hopes that her husband will turn to art as a way out of the Church and his own spiritual struggle, and she waits for him to begin the work that will insure his future as an artist. She fails, however, to take into account the nature of many of Philip's sketches and paintings. Her first night in Horizon, Mrs. Bentley writes,

> And as usual he's been drawing again. I turned over the top sheet, and sure enough on the back of it there was a little Main Street sketched. It's like all the rest, a single row of smug, false-fronted stores, a loiterer or two, in the distance the prairie again. And like all the rest there's something about it that hurts. False fronts.... ought always to be seen...[as] pretentious, ridiculous, never as Philip sees them, stricken with a look of self-awareness and futility. (4)

It appears from such drawings that rather than spending time in his study contemplating his future as an artist, Philip may be trying to come to an understanding of the towns in which he serves and his relationship to the "supreme being" (17) who, according to Mrs. Bentley, he believes has been responsible for placing him there. Ryszard Dubanski refers to Philip's drawings and paintings as "his journal" and comments that "An examination of [this] 'journal' suggests thematic concerns centred on ways of seeing and the meaning of existence."[42] Mrs. Bentley sends away for oil paints for Philip in an effort to encourage her husband to focus

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[42]Ryszard Dubanski, "A Look at Philip's 'Journal' in <u>As For Me and My House</u>," <u>Journal of Canadian Fiction</u> 24 (1979): 93.

his attention on art, but the picture Philip creates, with its "strength and fatalism" and "unflinching insight" (102), causes Mrs. Bentley to sit brooding about her own concepts of faith. In fact, most of the art Philip produces on his "hard days" (101) is, according to his wife, concerned with another "reality," "More important, more significant than ours...that [Philip] understands only vaguely" [101] but tries repeatedly to express through his sketches and paintings. Mrs. Bentley observes,

> It's always been my way to comfort myself thinking that water finds its own level, that if there's anything great or good in a man it will eventually find its way out. But I've never taken hold of the thought and analyzed it before, never seen how false it really is. Water gets dammed sometimes; and sometimes, seeking its level, it seeps away in dry, barren earth. Just as he's seeping away among the false fronts of these little towns. (102)

The possibility Mrs. Bentley fails to consider is that Philip may already have found his "own level." Painting, for Philip, is, it seems, a means toward a deeper spiritual understanding of God, His will, and His world. Philip's paintings are, in many cases, sermons preached in a different medium.

Mrs. Bentley's perception of Philip is that "He's an artist, that's all, and he's going to waste" (102). She thinks of him "Alone in there [his study], hunched over his table, groping and struggling to fulfill himself - intent upon something that can only remind him of his failure, of the man he tried to be" (25) and believes that Philip should

have been "anything but what he is, what I've made him" (103). It is easy to understand that Philip may rankle under his wife's opinion of him. She is only willing to accept the part of his personality that pleases her, and this helps to explain Philip's anger when he finds Mrs. Bentley showing his sketches to Mrs. Bird. A large part of Mrs. Bentley's guilt and consequent unhappiness also comes from her unwillingness to accept her husband as a complete man who is both artist <u>and</u> preacher. Her diary is filled with statements of regret over what she sees as Philip's ruined career: "Had I not met him then he might have got away as he planned, eventually realized his ambitions" (33). "Perhaps had he been stronger he might not have let me stop him" (103).

It is significant that while Mrs. Bentley is with him, Philip is "actually helpless to draw a single line" (43). Mrs. Bentley does not understand the man, his art, or his struggle with faith, nor, it seems, does she want to understand her husband in all his aspects. Writing about Philip's drawing of a little schoolhouse that embodies, for Paul and herself, "Faith, ideals, reason" (80), Mrs. Bentley notes that, in Philip's view, "it's form that's important in a picture, not the subject or the association that the subject calls to mind; the pattern you see, not the literary emotion you feel" (80). While readers could perceive Philip's argument as one more instance of fragmentation in

the novel, there is also the possibility that he is attempting to tell his wife not to put such emphasis on her sentimental dream of the person she wants him to be; rather, she should observe not only the fact and form of the picture, but of the artist as well. Only then will she be able to recognize the man to whom she is married. Philip cannot, as Mrs. Bentley hopes he will, turn to art as a way out of his struggle with the Church and Christianity. In his life, art and religion are inextricably linked, and one merely provides the means of gaining deeper insight into the other. Because Mrs. Bentley continues to impose a distinction between her dream of Philip the artist and the reality of Philip the preacher, she contributes to the fragmentation of the Bentley marriage and to the Bentleys' isolation from one another.

Philip himself is an incomplete character. Perhaps the most dramatic representation of this incompleteness is found in Mrs. Bentley's frequent comparisons of her husband and Joe Lawson. It is almost as if the two men form one person. Philip, in his struggles with theology and his fascination with art, has become so involved with the spiritual and intellectual aspects of life that he has to a large extent divorced himself from the land and from practical concerns. Mrs. Bentley comments on his ineptitude with packing cases, his struggle with stovepipes, and his dislike of digging a garden. In the matter of budgeting, Philip is also highly

impractical.

Joe, on the other hand, is tied to the land and physical labour. Several times Mrs. Bentley comments on his hands, hands that are "so faithful to the earth and seasons that betray them" (139). It often seems that Joe has a faith that Philip lacks, a faith in the land and the seasons and a belief, like that of many other prairie dwellers, in "the year it rained all June, and next year" (97). As noted previously, Mrs. Bentley likes the stolid, masculine qualities she sees in Joe and wishes she could find such attitudes in Philip. Still, Joe's faith in the land and his strong, quiet assertion of his masculinity are not enough. Joe does, after all, lose the son he adores, and after Peter's funeral, Joe must admit that the land has betrayed his trust. He tells Mrs. Bentley "almost bitterly," "'We aren't going to get even our seed this year. Maybe he's not missing such a lot'" (109). Joe needs more in his life than just his family and the land that fails him. Perhaps, as Philip does, he needs to leave the practical concerns of life for a time in order to explore the world "'that's illusory, yet somehow more important'" (112). Basic elements are missing from the characters of both Philip and Joe, and until each incorporates into his life some of the characteristics evident in his counterpart, neither will be truly complete.

Mrs. Bentley is also an incomplete character, at least

by her own standards and, she fears, by Philip's as well, for she has been able to give her husband only a stillborn baby. In desperation, Mrs. Bentley reaches out to Philip, asking him to make her complete: "...I get impatient being just his wife, and start in trying to mother him too" (4). Evidence of this mothering runs throughout the novel as Mrs. Bentley tries to think for her husband. She coaxes him to supper, cautions him in front of Paul to use his "'company manners'" (35), scolds him about the suit he ruins fighting a fire, takes away the lamp so that he cannot continue working on a stovepipe on which he has cut himself, and speaks for him when he cannot, or will not, speak for himself.

As Joe Lawson exemplifies missing portions of Philip's life and character, so Judith West demonstrates what is missing in Mrs. Bentley. Judith's "peculiar...whiteness" (11), mentioned over and over again, makes her appear to be a wraith-like creature rather than a flesh-and-blood woman. Judith is, however, a suitable counterpart for Mrs. Bentley. The two women are alike in that they are completely captivated by Philip. In an effort to attract him that parallels Mrs. Bentley's efforts previous to her marriage, Judith begins wearing a new dress and make-up when she comes to the Bentley home. Just as Mrs. Bentley sacrificed her dreams of musical success to her desire for Philip, so Judith's affair with Philip necessitates the sacrifice of her dream of one

day returning to the city. Unlike the union between Philip and Mrs. Bentley, however, that between Philip and Judith is a fruitful one, and Judith provides the Bentleys with the child that Mrs. Bentley is incapable of producing. It is worthy of note that Mrs. Bentley writes, "Better than anyone else's I think I could take [Judith's] baby and forget it isn't mine" (155). Judith provides the life force that is absent from the Bentleys' barren relationship.

In what is perhaps the most important instance of fragmentation in As For Me and My House, the message of the Old Testament is isolated from that of the New Testament. The world Ross creates in this book is almost exclusively an Old Testament one. This is the only text considered in this thesis in which such a distinction is so obvious. It is apparently in order to illustrate the need in the world he has created for a Saviour and for the beliefs and values commonly associated with New Testament Christianity that Ross has structured his novel in this way. Although according to Scripture a firm division between an Old Testament God of vengeance and a New Testament God of love is inaccurate, such a distinction plays an important part in As For Me and My House.[43] It is true that vengeance and

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[43]The designation of the Old Testament as a book that demonstrates God's wrath and the New Testament as a book that demonstrates God's love is a fallacy as common as are the misconceptions about Calvinism mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. Sandra Djwa, for example, often makes this kind of distinction in her articles that are cited in this chapter. Although, as I have said, Sinclair

retribution figure prominently in the Old Testament, but they are the answers of a totally righteous God to unrighteousness on the part of the Israelites or their enemies. The God of the Old Testament was also the Deliverer and Protector of His people, but for the most part, these facts are ignored in this novel. Jehovah in His most fearsome aspect inhabits this world and takes vengeance on its inhabitants. It is one conception of this God that, Mrs. Bentley claims, haunts her husband. She tells her readers that Philip

> keeps on believing that there's a will stronger than his own deliberately pitted against him.... there persists this conviction of a supreme being interested in him, opposed to him, arranging with tireless concern the details of his life to make certain it will be spent in a wind-swept, sunburned little Horizon. (17)

She writes that Philip believes "with something deeper than his intellect...that Horizon is his due" (18), and she explains that

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Ross is the only one of the authors treated in this thesis who sustains such a distinction, this common view of the Old Testament is certainly evident in the work of W. O. Mitchell. Note, for example, the following passage from Who Has Seen the Wind: "The minister was aware of an undying, Old Testament thirst for revenge - a thirst, he revolved [sic] fiercely, that should have its full slaking one day" (W. O. Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind (1947; Toronto: Macmillan, 1972) 130). In its extreme form, such a distinction between the two major sections of the Bible constitutes the heresy known as Marcionism and may suggest anti-Semitic feelings in those who adopt this view of Scripture. I do not believe, however, that this accusation can be levelled at the authors and critics cited in this thesis. They are merely echoing what has become a widely-accepted, if inaccurate, stereotype.

> He made a compromise once, with himself, his conscience, his ideals; and now he believes that by some retributive justice he is paying for it. A kind of Nemesis. He pays in Main Streets - this one, the last one, the Main Streets still to come. (18)

This conception of God as a vengeful Presence mirrors rather than triumphs over the forces of nature so evident on the prairie. This is a God who, instead of giving men and women a sense of power and importance, inspires guilt in those who do not feel they have measured up to His standards and inevitably exacts punishment for sins committed. There is no escape from such a Being. He is demanding and uncompromising, and His punishment for disbelief is harsh and unending. As Sandra Djwa comments wryly, "Many...scenes of human despair and futility suggest that the President of the Immortals also has his sport with the people of Ross's prairie."[44] The God whom Philip and the people of the prairie settlements attempt to serve is the God of the wind and dustclouds who is described in the Old Testament. Because of his obvious use of Old Testament references and allusions, it seems likely that Ross was familiar with and perhaps patterned the God of As For Me and My House on descriptions of Jehovah like the following from the book of Nahum:

> God is jealous, and the Lord avenges;
> The LORD avenges and is furious.
> The LORD will take vengeance on His adversaries,
> And He reserves wrath for His enemies;
> The LORD is slow to anger and great in power,
> And will not at all acquit the wicked.

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[44]Djwa, "No Other Way" 53.

> The LORD has His way
> In the whirlwind and in the storm,
> And the clouds <u>are</u> the dust of His feet.
> He rebukes the sea and makes it dry,
> And dries up all the rivers.
> Bashan and Carmel wither,
> And the flower of Lebanon wilts. (Nah. 1:2-4)

In fear, the people of the prairie farms and towns cower before the dreadful wind, not realizing that it is the embodiment of the God they have chosen to serve.

There is no room in such a conception of "a supreme being" for love, mercy, or redeeming grace. The world Ross creates in <u>As For Me and My House</u> is one that has not yet received the covenant promise of the New Testament. Although the God of retribution visits here regularly, the God who planned the salvation of humankind is virtually unknown throughout most of the novel. Yet this is a land and a people very much in need of the healing and mercy that are part of the new covenant of Scripture. It is a world that waits for its completion.

As did Jehovah in the Old Testament, the God of <u>As For Me and My House</u> demands sacrifice from His people as atonement for their sins. The concept of sacrifice as a necessary part of the practice of religion is inherent in Paul's words when he notices Mrs. Bentley's music book the first Sunday the Bentleys go the Partridge Hill. He asks, "'Did you know that <u>offertory</u> comes from a word meaning <u>sacrifice</u>?'" (8). Blessing and valuable insights, it seems, are only bestowed once a suitable price has been paid. For

example, El Greco must die before Mrs. Bentley can understand the truth about her false assumption that a person can play God and create another living being in a desired image:

> We meant well.
>
> It always turns out the same when you make up your mind that what's right for you must be right for someone else. I made up my mind about Philip once - and as a result see what he is today. He was so dark and bitter and lonely, struggling away toward such cold, impossible goals, and I was so sure that my little way of sympathy and devotion was the better way. Maybe there would be three of us today a lot happier if I'd had El Greco to teach me his lesson fourteen or fifteen years ago. (149-50)

In reenactments of the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac, the God who rules this world demands the sacrifice of both Joe Lawson's son, Peter, and Philip Bentley's adopted son, Steve. Whereas in the Old Testament story, Isaac was spared because his father, Abraham, "fear[ed] God" (Gen. 22:12) and was unfaltering in his obedience to Him, the God who visits Joe and Philip finds no such faith and trust. Joe, who has with the other inhabitants of Partridge Hill tried "'to assert'" himself, "'to insist upon [his] own meaning and importance'" (19), and to show allegiance to the land and its gods, must watch his son die. Within the Old Testament framework of the novel, this sacrifice may indeed be perceived as an offering to Jehovah in atonement for idol worship. It may also, however, be seen as a sacrifice to the gods of the land. In either case, the sacrifice is an acceptable one, for less than two weeks after Peter's death the rain that no prayers could bring comes to Partridge

Hill.

Like Peter's death, the removal of Steve from the Bentley home may also have a dual significance. Philip, who has idolized his "son" and worshipped him rather than Jehovah, sees Steve taken away by the Catholic brothers, servants of the Lord. Steve is also, however, a sacrifice to the small-town gods of whom Mrs. Bentley is so aware. The limited thinking of the townspeople, who are firmly against the adoption of a Catholic child by their Protestant minister, has certainly been the force moving someone to report Steve's situation to the Catholic brothers.[45] It seems that the answer to the town's bigoted prayers comes, at least in part, through human rather than Divine means.

The theme of sacrifice finds its ultimate expression in the death of Judith West. In the Gospels, Christ is said to have paid the price for the sin of all people with His crucifixion; in somewhat similar manner, Judith makes atonement with her death for the sins of all the "pagans" and idolaters in Horizon and its environs. In this context, it is perhaps significant that Judith dies in April, a time of rebirth and the month in which Easter, a remembrance of Christ's crucifixion and a celebration of His resurrection,

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[45]The fact that the Catholics hurry to remove Steve from the Bentley home is an indication that prejudice and limited thinking are not exclusive to the Protestant churches of Main Street.

often falls.[46]

Early in the novel, Ross makes it evident that Judith will play the role of saviour. Mrs. Bentley writes that when, in the midst of a prairie windstorm, Philip and the choir are powerless to bring God's message to the Horizon congregation, "Judith scaled [the wind]" (38). As the girl from the sandhills who has come to live within the confines of the town, Judith is the necessary link between the form and tradition of Horizon and the land, between the Christian God and the gods who inhabit the elements. Sandra Djwa writes of her death,

> ...it would appear that there was, in fact, no other way for Judith, either in terms of the deterministic nature of Ross's art or of the novel's mythic structure. Her sacrifice, like that of Steve and El Greco, can be seen as the last sacrifice required by the pagan gods of Main Street.[47]

Djwa also notes, however, that Ross "appear[s] to have a lingering moralistic streak...which...can result in the death of the girl Judith as a kind of punishment by the Old Testament God of judgement...."[48] As well as being a sacrifice to these gods, Judith's death can further be seen

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[46]The fact that Ross allows Judith, an adulteress, to assume a Christ-like role in As For Me and My House may be an indication that he sees a need to expand the traditional Christian concepts of righteousness and morality. The need for such expansion is a major theme in each of the other novels examined in this thesis.

[47]Djwa, "No Other Way" 62.

[48]Djwa, "False Gods" 49.

as a final sacrifice required by the gods of the land. It is, after all, the "soft," "sticky" (161) mud that exhausts her and brings on her labour.

Ross's treatment of the theme of sacrifice as well as his combination of Christian worship with the worship of the gods of Main Street and the gods of the land indicate that there is considerable overlapping in this novel between Judeo-Christian and pagan concepts. By pointing out parallels between pagan beliefs and the Christianity practised by the residents of Horizon and their neighbours, Ross asks readers to consider the validity of many of the harsher ideas that have been prominent in traditional Christian teaching.

As long as the gods mentioned in this novel along with dead tradition and form rule the lives of the Bentleys and those around them, existence is far from the full life promised by Christ when He stated, "'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have <u>it</u> more abundantly'" (John 10:10). The images of fruitbearing vines used by Jesus in John 15:1, 4, and 5 to illustrate the life His followers could have were they to remain true to Him and His principles are in sharp contrast to Mrs. Bentley's dying garden with its "single poppy" (105) and the stillborn baby she bears early in the Bentley marriage. In the same way that evidence of abundant life is missing from this novel, the joy promised by Christ when He said, "'These things I have

spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and <u>that</u> your joy may be full'" (John 15:11) has been suppressed under the restrictions and fears engendered by the forms of Christianity encountered in the small prairie towns of which Mrs. Bentley writes. The dust that fills the houses with "a haze...like smoke" (42) and "formed in veins and wrinkles round [the people's] eyes" (38) is symbolic of the stifling aspects of Main Street religion. Laurence Ricou writes that "the dust represents suffocation in all respects, particularly emotional and intellectual suffocation."[49] The codes of behaviour and worship that continue to be accepted by the Horizon Christians effectively smother the vibrancy of Christianity in the same way that the dust threatens to smother the inhabitants of the prairie. Although celebration and praise involving dance, music, and clapping of hands are vital parts of worship according to Scripture,[50] Mrs. Bentley sees her Horizon home as a house that frowns on festivity:

> I wanted to celebrate, and the walls disapproved. They seemed to be concentrating on me, trying with all their will power to restrain me to propriety and decorum. Every few minutes the windows gave a little rattle of deprecation. (58)

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[49]Ricou 86.

[50]See, for example, Psalm 47:1:
Oh, clap your hands, all you peoples!
Shout to God with the voice of triumph!
See also Psalm 149:3:
Let them praise His name with the dance;
Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp.

Philip's comment to Mrs. Bentley as she stands listening to the music of a dance band in the community hall, "'I suppose, if we knew how, we could dance a little just ourselves out here'" (48), may be seen as an attempt to escape from the restrictions of propriety and to replace the iron rule of the Church with an expression of joy. It is, however, a sadly inadequate attempt. Philip cannot dance, a fact proven during his time at the ranch, and even if he could, he is bound, as he was when smoking a pipe, by the need to hide his "sins" from the eyes of the staid church members.

This is not, Mrs. Bentley tells her readers, the only attempt Philip makes to bring more of the values of Gospel-based Christianity into his life and the lives of those to whom he preaches. As if talking about Him will make Him real, Philip makes the God of love the basis for many of his sermons. This is evident when Mrs. Bentley reports that a farm woman at Partridge Hill has said that the hard winter is "going to be a chance...for the Lord to show some of the compassion that Philip's forever talking about in his sermons" (113).

There are also attempts on Philip's part to include the truth of the Gospels in the practical side of his work. According to Mrs. Bentley, Philip often demonstrates compassion and understanding for his flock. David Williams writes that "the preacher-painter...will not declare '_Non serviam_,' but rather serves his people in ways that most of

them understand."[51] On the day of Peter Lawson's funeral, it is Philip who realizes that the Bentleys must, in spite of the Lawsons' poverty, accept the offer of a chicken in order to help them "forget for a while" (109). He tactfully whispers to Mrs. Bentley that they can "make it up to them [the Lawsons] some other time" (113). Mrs. Bentley observes that when Philip visits the farmers "their poverty hurt[s] him" (132) and describes a sketch Philip makes of Joe Lawson as "One of those strong, passionate little things that crop out of him every now and then with such insight and pity that you turn away silent, somehow purged of yourself" (139). She states, "I didn't know before what drought was really like, watching a crop dry up, going on again. I didn't know Philip knew either" (139). Toward the end of the novel, Mrs. Bentley says that although "it isn't like him to spend many hours at a deathbed" (137), Philip demonstrates Christian concern by staying at an old man's bedside "till half-past ten" (139).

In his personal life, too, Philip makes a number of attempts to live in accordance with the Gospel he preaches. Following a quarrel with her husband, Mrs. Bentley takes a walk in the rain and returns to find Philip "in the doorway, starting out to look for [her]" (28). On one of the nights when Philip insists on closing his study door on his wife,

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[51]David Williams, "'Scarlet' Rompers: Toward a New Perspective in 'As For Me and My House,'" Canadian Literature 103 (Winter 1984): 165.

she points out that he has often tried, to some extent, to spare her pain: "As a rule he resists me more gently, with a furtive kind of care for my feelings" (48). Several times Mrs. Bentley writes that Philip, who usually waits until he believes she is asleep before he comes to bed, has been "kind" to her, although "from...a great distance" (120).

Philip's attempts to put into practice the principles advocated by Christ are, however, imperfect at best. Although he does make an effort toward living a more compassionate and Christian life-style, his white-lipped retreats into his study when any issue arises that upsets him testify to the fact that he has not yet incorporated into his life the Gospel concept of unconditional forgiveness. Mrs. Bentley reports that having given her a money order for twenty-five dollars, Philip "slammed the study door behind him, shamming a fit of pique and sulks to cover his generosity" (79). Philip has hurt his wife so often with his coldness that she is unable to believe that his efforts to make things better between them may be real. She feels she must continue "to be frugal with the moment[s]" (24) when Philip attempts to display affection and warmth. Just as Paul's claim to atheism is weakened by his constant church attendance, the effectiveness of Philip's attempts to practise the Christianity of the Gospels is lessened by the failures of which Mrs. Bentley makes her readers aware.

Mrs. Bentley, too, tries to incorporate into her life

some of the principles advocated in the New Testament. Sandra Djwa notes, "Realizing that the foundations of her own morality have also been modelled on the untried virtue of a smug Main Street, Mrs. Bentley gropes, with lapses, toward some other way."[52] The motives for her actions are often questionable, however. When Mrs. Bentley befriends the socially unacceptable Judith West, she extends this friendship partly because of her own pride and partly out of a desire to act in opposition to common opinion:

> I think I'm going to like Judith. Maybe because she looked as if she thought I played the organ rather well; maybe because I sense an attitude towards her a little hostile and contemptuous, and because there's a perverse, rebellious part of me that instinctively feels it must be against Horizon rather than with it in its dislikes and prejudices. (11)

Mrs. Bentley offers to adopt Steve, but she does it to assuage her guilt over not giving Philip a son. She "grudge[s] every minute he and Philip are alone together" (52) and tries to wait patiently "till Steve blows over" (53). Mrs. Bentley uses Steve for her own ends, hoping "Steve may help Philip back where he belongs" (53), and she admits that she "can give [Steve] only a twisted, hybrid love" (111). At one point, Mrs. Bentley deliberately uses Steve to hurt her husband, playing the piano "brilliantly, vindictively, determined to let Philip see how easily if I wanted to I could take the boy away from him" (47).

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[52]Djwa, "No Other Way" 59-60.

There is a change in Mrs. Bentley following Philip's act of adultery. It is as if, having borne the ultimate degree of suffering for a woman who idolizes her husband, Mrs. Bentley has determined that she will do all she can to replace the shallowness of her life and her relationships with values that are enduring. She begins to realize that her misery is not unique, and a new desire for selflessness surfaces in her. Looking at Philip's sketch of Joe Lawson, she says, "There comes over me a kind of urge to do something strong and steadfast too. For what it's worth I sit vowing that I'll never complain about my clothes and furniture again" (139). Mrs. Bentley has, it seems, learned to "'turn the other cheek'" (Matt. 5:39), at least for a time. When Philip angrily suggests that Mrs. Bentley should forget about Paul and remember she is married, she writes, "I mustn't let it anger me to flinging Judith at him" (135). Although she cannot bring herself to verbally offer Philip forgiveness for his adultery, afraid "he'll think it just a gesture of smug self-righteousness, will shrink away uneasy, and for having been forgiven will never forgive" (136), she does write in her diary,

> I've lived through it [Philip's adultery], left it behind. I wish I could tell him that there's no guilty or not guilty....It's his own verdict of guilty that stands between us, not mine. (135)

Mrs. Bentley does, in fact, forgive Philip for betraying her. When he sneers at her "'success'" (145) in charming Paul with her playing, Mrs. Bentley makes an almost super-

human effort to understand the reasons behind Philip's actions and words:

> I felt no rancor, no affront....I understood suddenly that only out of some torture or sickness could such a laugh [as Philip has just laughed] have come. And I saw him suffering and alone and in need of me, and I went back to him....I went over to him, put a tentative hand on his shoulder. I tightened my fingers, gently and firmly, trying not to obtrude myself, yet to make him understand that if there was anything he might want to share with me I was with him, waiting and willing. (145-46)

Mrs. Bentley not only forgives Philip, whom she adores, but she makes an attempt to forgive Judith as well, in keeping with the biblical commands,

> "Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him;
> If he thirsts, give him a drink;
> For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."
> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:20-21)

Unable to bear "the white silent misery in [Philip's] face" (152), Mrs. Bentley sends him to visit the pregnant Judith thinking "that if they were alone together for a while it might make things easier" (152). She sends her rival magazines and oranges, and when Philip complains that it is too cold to go to the farm where Judith lives, Mrs. Bentley overrides his objection saying that "it was never too cold for him to ride to Partridge Hill on Sundays" (152).

Even though Mrs. Bentley has a new desire to improve her life, she still has cause to reflect on the motives for her actions, motives she herself does not fully understand:

> Maybe I was afraid that alone out there all

> these months she [Judith] might weaken and tell her family it was Philip. Maybe I was just sorry, maybe even grateful. When questioned she only sets her lips and moves away, they tell me, and I can't help thinking it's for my sake. (152)

Perhaps there is some desire to "'heap coals of fire'" on Judith's head in what Mrs. Bentley does, but there is also a note of compassion and understanding in her musings when she writes,

> When you're the wife at a time like this it's hard to be fair, but I can't believe that there's anything very treacherous about her [Judith]. I might have done a lot worse had she been the wife. (152)

It is true that Mrs. Bentley often slips in her efforts to cultivate new attitudes. Suspicious of Philip as he goes out to sit with the dying man, she admits that she is "hoping...that the old man doesn't last to take him [Philip] out another night" (139). She sends Judith a Christmas gift "deliberately to hurt her" (147), although she does feel sorry for her action later. Thinking of adopting Judith's baby she feels "[her] blood go thin, and [her] lips set hard and cruel":

> I told him [Philip] he must make her understand that once we take the baby she is never to see it again - that she is never to see even me. ..."Make it clear to her," I said, "that she can't refuse. Tell her that we can give her child opportunity and a name. Tell her how he will suffer if she keeps him, grow up and eventually hate her. You tell her, or I will." (156)

Mrs. Bentley's desire to give Judith's child a family that meets traditional Christian standards may be commendable. In carrying out her plan, however, she demands that the

child deny his origins. By insisting that all ties between Judith and her baby be severed and the child be treated as the Bentleys' own, Mrs. Bentley is, in effect, adding to the instances of hypocrisy and untruth that abound in the Bentleys' lives. Following Judith's death, Mrs. Bentley writes, "It's what I've been hoping for all along. I'm glad she's gone - glad" and adds, entirely unconvincingly, "for her sake as much as ours" (162). In view of such statements, one might wonder if Mrs. Bentley's talk of forgiveness is merely "smug self-righteousness" (136). It would, however, take a woman very firmly established in the teachings of the Gospels to show complete magnanimity toward the one who has violated the marriage she treasures above all things, and Mrs. Bentley has only just begun to try to implement the values of the New Testament.

Neither Philip nor Mrs. Bentley are completely successful in incorporating compassion and forgiveness into their lives, but it is the attempt to replace the stern, form-bound religion that is practised in Horizon with these new, kinder concepts that is important. Sandra Djwa refers to this replacement as the coming of a "new covenant [that] consists not of outward forms and laws as does the Mosaic code, but of the spirit of God written upon man's heart."[53]

With the sacrifice of Judith, the God of mercy and love, the God of "compassion" (113) about whom Philip has

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[53]Djwa, "False Gods" 43-44.

preached so long, finally begins to make His Presence known in this barren world, and Philip, the modern-day Abraham of Ross's story, has his Isaac restored to him with the birth of Judith's child. The baby conceived in dishonour becomes the son Philip has always dreamed of having. In the biblical story, Isaac's restoration to Abraham meant that the way was opened for the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham about his descendants, the nation of Israel. When a son is restored to Philip, the way is opened for the fulfillment of the New Testament promise of abundant life made by the Christ of the Gospels. It is as if the God of mercy has, in fact, granted Mrs. Bentley and Philip the chance to make a new beginning. Sandra Djwa writes that "certainly, in the larger structure of [As For Me and My House], there is a kind of grace bestowed."[54] Djwa further observes that

> the development of the novel leads to some new possibility characterized by a new honesty, a child, and 'a stillness, a freshness, a vacancy of beginning', suggesting a movement from the Old Testament to the New.[55]

Mrs. Bentley points out this idea of new beginning when she says of Philip's son, "He doesn't look like Philip yet, but Philip I'll swear is starting to look like him" (165). Readers familiar with the Gospels may see in Mrs. Bentley's words an allusion to Christ's pronouncement, "'...unless one

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[54]Djwa, "No Other Way" 63.

[55]Djwa, "No Other Way" 56.

is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'" (John 3:3). Philip's childlike "vacancy of beginning" (165) may be a signal that he is on his way, with Mrs. Bentley, to seeing "'the kingdom of God,'" a new covenant relationship with God and those around him, become a reality in his life.

The final step in the movement toward a new beginning and the practice of New Testament Christianity is marked by the windstorm that begins to blow through Horizon two days after Judith's death. Within the Scriptural framework Ross has established for this text, this last major windstorm may be equated with the coming to Horizon of the Holy Spirit who, at Pentecost, manifested Himself to the waiting disciples as "a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind" (Acts 2:2) and who, Jesus said, "'[would] convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment'" (John 16:8). This new wind that sweeps through Horizon is not the wind of a wrathful Jehovah or that of the pagan gods, both of which threatened the people of the prairie with vengeance and annihilation. It is a cleansing, healing wind that brings the promise of salvation.

When the Bentleys returned from Stanley and Laura's ranch, Mrs. Bentley noted,

> We've told everybody already how much we enjoyed our vacation, how it's heartened and refreshed us, with what renewed enthusiasm we take up our task again of working for the Lord.
> "Enthusiasm," says Paul dryly..."that's what it means, you know, the god within." (105)

From their vacation, however, the Bentleys could gain only a

superficial enthusiasm, the result of physical rest, and readers may suspect that their claim to even this kind of enthusiasm is a false one. The windstorm that follows Judith's death brings enthusiasm in its literal sense to the Bentleys and to Horizon.

In the same way that the physical wind blows down Horizon's false fronts, the wind of the Holy Spirit blows down the hypocrisy and the false conceptions of Christianity behind which the Bentleys and their Main Street neighbours have hidden. It is during the storm that Mrs. Bentley faces Philip with the truth about their child. She tells her readers, "I ran to the bedroom door, flung it open, and showed him the baby. 'Your baby!' I cried. 'Yours - '" (163). This confrontation opens the way for a new, more honest relationship in the Bentley home.

Such openness and truth promise to be far more healing than all the covert acts of forgiveness and love Mrs. Bentley previously carried out. Philip stops trying to live by the false dictates of righteous behaviour that are part of Main Street Christian propriety and decides to resume smoking a pipe, this time openly instead of waiting until visitors are not likely to drop by. His only hesitation about smoking is caused by his fear that it might hurt the baby. His concern with religious form and morality has been replaced by concern for another person. Mrs. Bentley faces an important truth about who she really is and relinquishes

her part in the book store project:

> I thought at first that we'd put the piano in the store and sell music too, but the more I think about it the more I'm convinced that Philip would be better without me. In workaday matters I'm so much more practical and capable than he is that in a month or two I'd be one of those domineering females that men abominate. (160)

In addition to Horizon's false fronts, the wind also destroys Mrs. Ellingson's chicken coop and most of her hens. These had been a source of contention between Mrs. Ellingson and the residents of the parsonage for some time, and this destruction may be perceived as marking a new dispensation of brotherly love in the town.

Mrs. Bentley demonstrates that she is learning tolerance for and understanding of her neighbours. When she describes the farewell given the Bentleys by the Horizon church she writes, "It's the way of a little Main Street town - sometimes a rather nice way" (164). The bitterness that Mrs. Bentley has shown throughout most of the novel toward the Main Street churches seems to have dissipated. She still feels that neither she nor Philip belong in the ministry, but she is finally able to look kindly on those who do want to be a part of the Church and its functions.

A change also seems to take place in the attitude of the Horizon church members toward the Bentleys, or at least in the attitude Mrs. Bentley has perceived the members to have. Mrs. Bentley reports that at the farewell supper they "made speeches, sang <u>God Be With You Till We Meet Again</u>,

presented us with a handsome silver flower basket" (164). The townsfolk also assure Mrs. Bentley that, contrary to what she has thought, they have liked the Bentleys and thought that Philip "was always such an earnest, straightforward man" and that Mrs. Bentley "minded [her] own business, came and went willingly, was the sort of woman they could look up to" (164). As Roy Daniells puts it, "'God Be With You Till We Meet Again' weaves its little tie with some scarcely accessible ministry of grace."[56]

Daniells sees As For Me and My House as "a little *exemplum* of faith severely tried and of hope, after long waiting, triumphant."[57] In spite of such a comment, however, it is difficult to see the ending of this novel as unreservedly optimistic since the conclusion is filled with uncertainties. Ryszard Dubanski states that "nothing has been reconciled or redeemed. The most that can be said is that there is a new, limited honesty between husband and wife concerning the paternity of Judith's baby, nothing more."[58] Paul Comeau comments, "Together, the baby and the money signal the possibility of renewal....But the concluding images are ambiguous, casting doubt on the ultimate

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[56]Daniells ix.

[57]Daniells x.

[58]Dubanski 89.

fulfilment of the dream."[59]

Mrs. Bentley's final words, "That's right, Philip, I want it so" (165), in response to Philip's concern that she may not be able to tell the difference between Philip the father and Philip the son, may, in fact, signal a fresh beginning for the Bentleys. These words may be Mrs. Bentley's ultimate statement of forgiveness and may mean that she wants to forget all about the past with the failure and guilt it contains and that she wants her relationship with her husband to be as fresh as her relationship with her new son. On a much less hopeful note, however, these words may indicate that, in spite of the Bentleys' new beginning and their attempts to incorporate the values of the Gospels into their lives, nothing has really changed. Philip is still unable to assume any of the strength and implacability that Mrs. Bentley admired in Joe Lawson, and Mrs. Bentley is still in control. It is Mrs. Bentley's "'will'" that will "'be done'" (Luke 11:2), and the same situation about which she has felt so much guilt persists. Commenting on the effect she hopes the new baby will have on Philip, Mrs. Bentley admits that she has volunteered to adopt Judith's child in the hope that this will bring about change in her husband and will ultimately force him to leave the Church:

> He must leave the Church....In our lives it isn't the Church itself that matters but what he

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[59]Paul Comeau, "Sinclair Ross's Pioneer Fiction," Canadian Literature 103 (Winter 1984): 181.

> feels about it, the shame and sense of guilt he suffers while remaining a part of it. That's why we're adopting Judith's baby. He'll not dare let his son see him as he sees himself; and he's no dissembler. (155)

Later, she states, "After all that's what I did it for, to make him change. I should be satisfied" (157).

Mrs. Bentley's will certainly does seem to be uppermost in the Bentleys' situation. More than a week before Judith's baby is born, Mrs. Bentley writes, "It's going to be a boy, of course, and I'm going to call him Philip too" (158). Also, one must not forget that it is Mrs. Bentley's plan of escape that has been adopted by the family. This may be a new beginning for the Bentleys, but there are ominous echoes of the beginning of the Bentley marriage when, according to Mrs. Bentley, she "won [her] place in [Philip's] life despite him" (33). She once acknowledged in her musings that Philip "needed above all things to be free" (33). The move from Horizon and from the ministry could be just another trap unconsciously engineered by Mrs. Bentley for Philip, herself, and their new child. There is also the unhappy suggestion that Mrs. Bentley's decision to name the child Philip may indicate a return to her former sin of image-making. She may be intending to mold her son into the Philip she has always wanted but has, up to this point, been unable to fashion.

The new kindness and consideration shown by the church members when the Bentleys leave Horizon is also open to

question. Mrs. Bentley has, after all, described for her readers a similar display of affection and good will that took place when Steve left town:

> Word that Steve was leaving had already spread round the town, and at the station there was a little crowd gathered to say good-by to him. It's the way of a Main Street. We could scarcely get near him to say good-by ourselves. There were three or four little gifts for him. Even Mrs. Finley was there. She asked God to bless him, and knew he was going to be a better boy. (116-17)

Once Steve leaves town, however, there is no noticeable change in the bigoted citizens who protested his adoption by the Bentleys.

Laurence Ricou writes that "The oppressive atmosphere in As For Me and My House is emphasized by Ross's insistence on the repetitive cycle in the lives of his characters."[60] Of Philip's affair with Judith Mrs. Bentley writes, "Deep inside I even know that it really isn't Judith. She was just there. Another time somebody else will be there" (130). Mrs. Bentley's Horizon garden with its "sick little poppy and nasturtium leaves curl[ed] up against the blistered earth" (79) is merely a reflection of her former garden in which "The little leaves would shrivel in the heat, one by one curl up against the dusty earth" and "As fast as they bloomed the poppies lost their petals in the wind" (44). Although readers may hope that the Bentleys and the members of the Horizon church will continue their new prac-

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[60]Ricou 87.

tice of Christian principles, they are forced to consider the possibility that, based on the evidence presented, there is a distinct prospect of a future that mirrors the past.

These uncertainties about the futures of the Bentley family and the Horizon townsfolk may be an indication of a belief on Ross's part that, although the life-style advocated in the New Testament is an ideal for which to strive, it is extremely difficult for ordinary men and women to successfully implement Christian principles in their lives. It is possible to abandon at least some of the false fronts raised by individuals and Christian institutions and to achieve at least partial honesty in human relationships, but Ross raises serious questions about whether it is possible to live totally in accordance with the ideas outlined in the Gospels. Ross presents the ideal, but he also presents the possibility of failure.

It is a matter of debate whether Ross has named his town Horizon because the Bentleys and the townspeople are really on the brink of a better existence based on Scriptural tenets or whether his choice of the name is ironic and indicates that he believes there can be no escape from the tradition and forms of religion that bind the residents of this prairie town. The horizon is defined as "the line of the apparent meeting of the sky with the earth or

sea,"[61] and it may be that the earth-bound existence of the citizens of Horizon can never, in fact, become a heavenly one. The meeting of the two realms may always remain only "apparent."

In any consideration of As For Me and My House, questions are likely to arise about whether or not Ross is actually in control of this novel that is so filled with ambiguities and uncertainties. It is, however, Ross's control that makes the patterning of events throughout the text, as Mrs. Bentley would say, "'dramatically right'" (56). There is the balancing of Philip's love affair with Judith against the love affair Paul would like to have with Mrs. Bentley. David Williams draws attention to the "long series of paired chapters"[62] in which the Bentleys' relationships with these two characters are explored. The trains that intrigue both Philip and Judith, Philip's three sons, each so different, Mrs. Bentley's dying gardens and house plants, the theme of sacrifice introduced so innocently by Paul and enacted with such devastating effects on the lives of the characters are indicative of the patterns that emphasize the existence of strict authorial control in this text. In addition, each image in the novel is chosen for maximum effect. For example, the comparison of roses on the wallpaper with eyes per-

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[61]"Horizon," Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary, 1977 ed.

[62]Williams 158.

fectly expresses the degree of paranoia Mrs. Bentley is experiencing.

The subtle way in which Ross introduces and confirms the information he wants his readers to grasp is also the mark of an artist in command of his work. Throughout the text, Ross constantly challenges his readers to put together facts with which they have been presented in order to complete their understanding of the scenes and situations Mrs. Bentley is describing. For instance, Mrs. Bentley's news that Steve has been taken away from the Bentleys by the Catholic brothers seems to come rather suddenly. Looking back in the text, however, one finds Mrs. Wenderby's observation: "'The Catholics have plenty of places they can send him [Steve] to'" (49). There is also Miss Twill's remark about the Bentleys' plan to adopt Steve:

> "You mean, of course...just till other arrangements can be made. Naturally you wouldn't think of keeping him....The Roman Catholics have so many places of their own that he could go to." (55)

There are, in fact, plenty of suggestions that the Protestant church members have been working for some time to effect the removal of the Roman Catholic boy from the Bentleys' home. As For Me and My House is a finely-crafted novel that reveals its secrets slowly and only as a result of repeated, intensive readings. Evelyn Hinz and John Teunissen note that "Ross is presenting us with a specific kind of 'unreliable narrative' - namely, a dramatic mono-

logue."[63] They add that

> in works of this kind...the author remains firmly in control and functions as the reader's friend, encouraging him to use his emotional response not as an end in itself but as a means to ferreting out the clues he has provided.[64]

It is a fact, however, that ambiguities abound in this novel and that for every statement of Mrs. Bentley's that is easily verifiable there are many others that are open to interpretation by individual readers. If in these instances Ross has not lost control of this book, then it follows that he must be deliberately devising such uncertainty as part of the message of the text. The ambiguities may, in fact, constitute a vital part of Ross's development of the theme of truth that was alluded to at the beginning of this chapter. Readers learn through actual experience with the novel that it is necessary to look closely in order to determine what is real, for surface appearances are often deceiving. Ross may be pointing out that the same principle should be employed with regard to Christianity. One must look beneath the facades of righteousness in order to discover whether the values of the Gospels lie at the heart of the religion that is being presented, for this is the true measure of valid Christian practice.

The ambiguities in the text may also signal Ross's assertion that there are no easy answers when discussing a

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[63]Hinz & Teunissen 101.

[64]Hinz & Teunissen 113.

subject as complex as the nature of Christianity. It is, in fact, impossible to speak in absolutes. William New writes,

> Mrs. Bentley herself is all too prone to approve or condemn, but Ross would have his readers avoid this. By his images and through the other characters, he shows us, in fact, how Mrs. Bentley's polarization of Horizon (this world, arid, sterile, bad) and the Bookstore (dream, water, fruitful, good) is invalid and gradually breaks down.[65]

This is a novel in which answers about Christianity are not spelled out. Instead, readers are challenged to look carefully at the subject and draw their own conclusions.

Although the ending of the book is far from totally positive, the point has been made that the values advocated in the New Testament are important. To a great extent, Ross deals in negatives in order to make this assertion clear. As Laurence Ricou comments, As For Me and My House is "a novel which devotes...much attention to life's meaninglessness."[66] The world Ross creates in this book is, like Philip's picture of two frozen horses, filled with "terror and pity and desolation" (153). Seeing the coldness and frustration in the Bentley home and watching the Bentleys' often half-hearted attempts to remedy the situation, readers can readily understand how more kindness, love that is not possessive and self-centered, and genuine concern for the people with whom each of the Bentleys come into contact

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[65]New 31.

[66]Ricou 88.

would better the lives of everyone involved. The same is true of the Horizon church where, readers can scarcely fail to see, the replacement of prejudice and pettiness with adherence to the principles of the Gospels would improve the quality of worship and fellowship. By depicting a world almost devoid of New Testament values, Ross suggests the change for the good that could conceivably come about were selfless concern for others, forgiveness, and equality to be added to life in Horizon and its environs and the propensity for judgement and vindictiveness taken away.

Laurence Ricou writes, "The brutal prairie erodes all human sensitivity and sympathy, leaving man exhausted and beaten."[67] In As For Me and My House, Sinclair Ross demonstrates the premise that this "human sensitivity and sympathy" can only be restored if and when the characters choose to implement the actions and attitudes taught by Christ and His followers. It is only the practice of Christianity as it was originally conceived that can add meaning and value to life lived in the face of an indifferent, seemingly hostile land.

[67]Ricou 93.

CHAPTER 2

"Faith of Our Fathers, Living Still"?[1]:

A Jest of God

In A Jest of God, Margaret Laurence, as did Sinclair Ross, frames questions about Christianity and the Church within a search for God and faith by her protagonist. Laurence has said of her own religious beliefs, "My background and heritage are strongly Christian, although I reserve the right to interpret things in my own way."[2] It is not necessary for Laurence to believe strictly all of the tenets of Christianity in order to feel that the Christian faith is a valuable avenue for her characters and her readers to explore. Laurence told Donald Cameron:

> I think that I see not only my characters but myself and everybody else in a world which is not devoid of religion. I don't have any feeling, personally, of loyalty to the traditional Christian religions....but I do not really believe that God is totally dead in our universe....A lot of my characters, like myself, inhabit a world in which they no longer believe in the teachings of the traditional church, but where these things have enormous emotional impact on them still, as

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[1]The title of this chapter is taken from the first line of a traditional hymn of the Christian Church, "Faith of Our Fathers," written in the nineteenth century by Frederick W. Faber.

[2]Margaret Laurence, "Upon a Midnight Clear" in Heart of a Stranger (1976; Toronto: Seal, 1980) 213.

they do on me.[3]

As was the case in As For Me and My House, readers of Laurence's novel are presented with an unreliable narrator. Because the story is told almost totally from Rachel's point of view and in the first person, it is often difficult to obtain a true impression of the world Rachel inhabits and of Rachel herself. Like Mrs. Bentley, she makes many remarks and comparisons that are the result of her own prejudices and frustrations. Early in the text, Laurence makes her readers aware that her protagonist's observations are not always to be taken at face value. On her way to meet Calla at the Tabernacle, Rachel describes herself as she appears in the store windows she passes:

> The white coat stands out, but not as handsomely as I'd hoped. To my passing eyes it looks now like some ancient robe around me, and the hood, hiding my hair, makes my face narrow and staring....I have to pass myself again and again, and see a thin streak of a person, like the stroke of a white chalk on a blackboard.[4]

Calla, however, greets Rachel by saying, "'You're looking very smart tonight, Rachel, in spite of the rain'" (29). Rachel's almost constant complaints that she is unattractive are also belied by the attentions of Lennox Cates who, she

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[3]Donald Cameron, "Margaret Laurence: The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom" in Conversations with Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973) 111-12.

[4]Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God (1966; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974) 29. All subsequent references to A Jest of God are to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

tells readers, asked her out twice a week until she "stopped seeing him before it went any further" (31). Rachel, in fact, no longer knows what she actually does think and believe. At one point she tells readers that she "got the curse this week" and then goes on to say:

> I was terribly relieved. It was a release, a reprieve.
>
> That is a lie, Rachel. That is really a lie, in the deepest way possible for anyone to lie.
>
> No. Yes. Both are true. Does one have to choose between two realities?...If you think you contain two realities, perhaps you contain none. (133)

Because Rachel's accounts cannot be trusted, it is necessary to look for objective ways of evaluating the people and situations presented in this text. Readers must closely consider the observations and actions of other characters in the novel in order to obtain a clear picture of Rachel and the town in which she lives. The same thing is true of the kinds of faith with which Rachel is confronted. The truth or falsity of her claims about various systems of belief must be determined by observing the lives of the people who adhere to those creeds.

Laurence also provides readers with another guide to help them sort out the realities in this text. H. J. Rosengarten writes,

> In any novel presented through the consciousness of a single character the reader is inevitably - and intentionally - given a partial vision of events; in A Jest of God our view of the world in which Rachel moves is filtered through the lens of her tortured and complex-ridden sensibility. But this does not mean that there is no way that

> we can arrive at a clear evaluation of Rachel and her miseries. She is possessed of a degree of self-awareness....To suggest that there is a lack of objectivity is to ignore the corrective distance presented within the character's own view of herself, the moral perspective that is provided by Rachel's dual consciousness....[5]

This self-awareness surfaces frequently in A Jest of God. Frustrated by her mother's constant questions about her personal life, Rachel thinks, "Why can't she die and leave me alone?" Shocked by what she has thought, however, she assures herself, "I don't mean it, anyway. I couldn't really mean that." But then her self-awareness takes over. "You mean it all right, Rachel. Not every minute, not every day, even. But right now, you mean it" (114). Later in the novel, Rachel accurately assesses her own capacity for accurate perception:

> The layers of dream are so many, so many false membranes grown around the mind, that I don't even know they are there until some knifing reality cuts through, and I see the sight of my other eyes for what it has been, distorted, bizarre, grotesque, unbearably a joke if viewed from the outside. (150-51)

The moments when "some knifing reality cuts through" are important points of reference for those who seek to understand fully Rachel and her situation. In A Jest of God readers are constantly challenged to use the clues Laurence has provided in order to determine the truth of Rachel's observations and, in so doing, to recognize the insightful

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[5]H. J. Rosengarten, "Inescapable Bonds," Canadian Literature 35 (1968): 99.

statements Laurence is making about the nature and practice of Christianity.

A Jest of God begins with a skipping rhyme that is heard by Rachel Cameron and tailored by her imagination to correspond with her situation:

> The wind blows low, the wind blows high
> The snow comes falling from the sky,
> Rachel Cameron says she'll die
> For the want of the golden city.
> She is handsome, she is pretty,
> She is the queen of the golden city - (1)

Denyse Forman and Uma Parameswaran have noted that "Each [of Laurence's Canadian novels] is bounded by a setting or a rhyme that provides not only a structural frame but also contains the key to the theme."[6] This rhyme, as Rachel hears it, is indicative of her spiritual state as the novel opens. On one level, "the golden city" stands for traditional Christianity in which life is seen as a pilgrimage, the ultimate goal of which is to reach a golden heaven. Rachel has rejected, or tried to reject, what have become the accepted views of God and religion among the members of the Manawaka middle class. For Rachel, who is controlled to a large extent by her memory of her father, Manawaka's former undertaker, an ethereal view of the Christian faith, such as that which presupposes a golden city and immortality at the end of one's life on earth, is unacceptable. Rachel

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[6]Denyse Forman and Uma Parameswaran, "Echoes and Refrains in the Canadian Novels of Margaret Laurence," Centennial Review 16 (1972): 235.

would have readers believe that such a view is as dead and meaningless for her as are the fairy tales of her childhood, which she has long since abandoned. Clara Thomas, writing about the opening rhyme, says, "Everyone recognizes the dream and its loss...."[7] Any beauty in conventional Christianity has become for Rachel a dream in which she may once have believed but which has vanished with her recognition of the realities of life. In fact, by linking the image of the golden city, the New Jerusalem, with a skipping rhyme that, Rachel surmises, must go "back and back, through time and languages" (2), Margaret Laurence suggests that the idea of "the golden city" may itself be little more than a fairy tale or myth. Rachel would like to think that she is a confirmed atheist in the tradition of her father. "My father would never go to church," she tells readers and adds, "Immortality would have appalled him, perhaps as much as it does me" (41).

On one level, however, A Jest of God is an examination of Rachel's recognition that she cannot adopt atheism. As did the characters in the Ross novel, Rachel looks for some sort of a God and a faith to help her handle the confusing situations that confront her. According to Rachel, the skipping children are singing that she "says she'll die/ For the want of the golden city" (1). By rejecting the beauti-

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[7]Clara Thomas, Margaret Laurence, Canadian Writers 3 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969) 47.

ful, but perhaps somewhat fanciful, concepts of heaven and immortality, Rachel has left a void in her life. The rhyme contains the suggestion that Rachel will be unable to survive unless she can either return to a belief in the ideas about Christianity she once held or find new concepts to replace those she has abandoned. Rachel's quest is not to come back to an untarnished belief in "the golden city," the promised reward of faithful Christians, but to find a faith and a concept of God that will provide some meaning for her own life and some comfort in difficulty.

Throughout the novel, Rachel searches for the existence of the God in whom she has stopped believing. She cries out for a God, stripped of human additions, who will become actively involved in her life. For example, listening to her mother's bridge cronies compliment her in hackneyed terms, Rachel thinks, "My God. How can I stand - " (17). When her mother sets up a guilt-inducing argument about the length of a walk she and Rachel have taken together, Rachel thinks, "Oh God. Again" (81). S. E. Read has written about Margaret Laurence, "Her command of language is sure and controlled. Each word is precisely chosen to produce a desired effect...."[8] Still, one might be tempted to dismiss these instances and others like them as merely Laurence's attempt to capture the authenticity of modern speech with its casual

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[8]S. E. Read, "Maze of Life: The Work of Margaret Laurence," Canadian Literature 27 (1966): 12.

use of profanity were it not for the conversations Rachel actually has with God. After her first date with Nick, she prays, "Please, God, let him phone" (95). When she thinks that Nick is married, she tells God, "This I cannot take. This I could argue with You (if You were there) until doomsday. How dare You?" (151). During the most serious crisis of Rachel's life, when she believes herself to be pregnant, she kneels and prays to a Being in whom she scarcely believes, yet is desperate to find. As her desperation increases, Rachel's prayers become more focused, and readers realize that from the first pages of the novel she has been calling out to God and hoping for answers in the form of some kind of intervention in her situation.

Although Rachel believes she does not want a God, her conversations with Him do indicate the necessity of having such a Being in her life. Catherine McLay, writing in Canadian Literature, says,

> Rachel's relationship to God is ambivalent. She observes the Sunday ritual of church to save argument with her mother, but she does not believe....Yet she cannot accept His non-existence....Doubting the reality of God, she demands His existence....And she confesses her deep need....[9]

Part of Rachel's confusion results from the concepts of religion with which she has been presented. Margaret Laurence has often expressed concern about how the past

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[9]Catherine M. McLay, "Every Man Is an Island: Isolation in A Jest of God," Canadian Literature 50 (1971): 67.

relates to the present and has written about "everything [being] acquired and passed on in a kind of memory-heritage from one generation to another."[10]

Rachel's ancestors have left her a barren spiritual heritage. As already mentioned, her father, her immediate ancestor, has passed on what might be termed the "non-inheritance" of atheism. Margaret Laurence has named Rachel's father Niall, perhaps suggesting denial or, by extension, "nihilism," which is defined as "total denial of all traditional principles, values, and institutions."[11] Niall Cameron's attempt to deny the existence of God and the principles of Christianity did not, however, lead to answers for him. Having denied the basic values that give quality to life, Niall could only move further and further away from the living into the funeral parlour world of the dead. That Rachel has attempted to adopt her father's atheism is not, however, surprising when one considers the alternative systems of belief presented to her by her mother and her community. As the novel opens, Rachel is already suffering intensely as a victim of Manawakan thought and values.

Laurence has written that "my grandparents' generation, the generation of pioneers of Scots-Presbyterian origin"

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[10]Margaret Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice," The Narrative Voice, ed. John Metcalf (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972) 126.

[11]"Nihilism," Funk & Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary, 1977 ed.

were "among the first to people the town I called Manawaka."[12] It is from these first settlers that the residents of Manawaka inherit many of their religious views. Clara Thomas has observed,

> Not only the Scottish Presbyterians, first to come to the Manawaka district, but the Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists who followed them, carried with them religions which balanced far more toward fear than love. Certainly everything they found in pioneer experience would confirm an impression that their God required hard service before rejoicing, as the land demanded battle and did not repay love.[13]

The adoption of such a severe and uncompromising religion and code of behaviour as that brought to Manawaka by the early settlers has had a number of unfortunate effects on the town and on the thinking of its inhabitants. The first is the fostering of a belief, similar to that observed in As For Me and My House, in a strict God who demands obedience and counters wrong-doing with vengeance. Kenneth Hughes has the following to say about this kind of a God:

> Rachel not only rejects the church...she also rejects the notion of a transcendent god, the god of her tribe. For this god is nothing less than an idol, a reflection of the authoritar[illegible] [illegible]iety that she also refuses to accept.

He designates this Being as "a remote and transcendent authoritarian god of fear" and links Him with the "decadent,

[12]Margaret Laurence, "A Place to Stand On" in Heart of a Stranger (1976: Toronto: Seal, 1980) 3.

[13]Thomas, Margaret Laurence 58.

life-denying set of social values"[14] held by those who believe in Him.

Laurence points out that one effect of living in a society that bases its whole fabric on the supposed will of an authoritarian God is that few members of such a society grow up and learn to think for themselves. This is the case with Rachel and her mother. Sandra Djwa says about the narrow concept of God and Christianity found in Manawaka:

> The characters of Margaret Laurence, like those of Sinclair Ross, all live in the same little "fundamentalist town"...and they all live their lives in stifling relation to the old gods of their fathers - gods which are dead and no longer viable for today's world yet nonetheless inescapable gods. Dominated by these gods which in some cases have been assimilated into a harsh and punishing superego, each character lives a childlike or inauthentic existence dominated by the dead parental voices of the past.[15]

Belief that one is under the control of a stern God of punishment and vengeance and the attempt to live in accordance with the dictates of an overly-strict moral code are likely, as was noted in the previous chapter, to engender a strong sense of guilt, and that is what has happened in Manawaka:

> The thesis is clear enough: that Protestant Puritanism...produced in Canada an inhibited, guilt-ridden people who were thereby prevented from entering into the full joys of this life, and who also developed deep fears about access to the

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[14]Kenneth James Hughes, "Politics and A Jest of God," Journal of Canadian Studies 13.3 (1978): 48.

[15]Sandra Djwa, "False Gods and the True Covenant: Thematic Continuity Between Margaret Laurence and Sinclair Ross," Journal of Canadian Fiction 1.4 (1972): 45.

full joys of the afterlife.[16]

Again and again, Rachel's sense of guilt manifests itself. Masturbation results in denial followed by rationalization: "I didn't. I didn't. It was only to be able to sleep" (19). She finds herself apologizing to Mrs. Cameron about almost everything, even for not telling her mother about a make-believe summer school course: "'It wasn't a secret. It was - oh, never mind. I'm sorry. I just never thought, I guess. I'm sorry'" (78).

The guilt and the constant striving to live up to standards set by others have always been part of Rachel's life. She remembers her mother chiding her during her childhood:

> Mother's voice, lilting and ladylike....I can't remember what my sin was, only the burden of listening to the jingle, knowing she would never smack me and get it over with, because she never did - that wasn't her way. She used to tell me over and over how my misdemeanours wounded her. They also hurt Jesus, as I recollect. (78)

Rachel uses sarcasm to make light of Mrs. Cameron's rebukes: "'Well, poor Jesus. No doubt He weathered it better than I did'" (78). Continued insistence on the fact that Rachel has hurt others with her actions has, however, had its effect. As the novel opens, it is clear that guilt has virtually immobilized her.

Rachel fears that she will suffer punishment because of her transgression of moral law. Thus, the inevitable result

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[16]Robert D. Chambers, "The Women of Margaret Laurence," Journal of Canadian Studies 18.2 (1983): 19.

of Rachel's joy in a sexual relationship must be pregnancy and consequent ostracism by her family and Manawakan society. Although Rachel has inherited the guilt associated with the religion of her ancestors, she, like the characters in As For Me and My House, has not inherited the accompanying idea of salvation through God's grace and belief in Christ. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist is quoted as saying, "'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29). In Rachel's religious philosophy, however, there is no Christ to bear her punishment. She must suffer the consequences of wrongdoing herself. The fear of not pleasing the authoritarian God and the other authority figures in her life, the fear of punishment when she offends, the fear of any kind of openness, the fear of human contact, all these fears play major parts in Rachel's life. Sandra Djwa writes that "there is a sense in which A Jest of God is a case study of a pathological fear, an all-pervasive anxiety that tends to choke the life out of all of Rachel's experiences."[17]

Those who come from a heritage of service to a God of laws and restrictions have, quite naturally, made their own human additions to the accepted moral code, thus further restricting existence. H. J. Rosengarten writes of "The small-town morality against which [Rachel] struggles," and he adds that the novel is concerned with "The theme of indi-

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[17]Djwa 48.

vidual aspiration conquered by social convention and personal guilt."[18] The inordinate concern of the residents of Manawaka for respectability may remind readers of similar feelings in evidence in the town of Horizon, where, Mrs. Bentley says, the townsfolk serve "the exacting small-town gods Propriety and Parity."[19] Such a constant obsession with manners and morality often leads to the establishment of false and twisted values. This is demonstrated by Mrs. Cameron as she gossips about Cassie Stewart:

> "You know the Stewart girl, Rachel?...You know she's been away?...The girl isn't married and no one even in prospect, so I gather."
> This circumlocution is necessary for Mother.
> "You mean she's had a child?"
> ...
> "Twins," she says sepulchrally. "What a heartbreak for her mother. Imagine. Twins."
> I have to resist some powerful undercurrent of laughter. Twins. Twice as reprehensible as one.
> "Is she going to keep them?"
> "That's the awful thing," Mother says. "Apparently she refuses to have them put up for adoption. I can't fathom the thoughtlessness of some girls." (58)

In Mrs. Cameron's mind, the sin of engaging in premarital sex is so staggering that it cannot even be mentioned directly. Once engaged in, it is the amount of evidence of the act that is most important. Twins make the mother more guilty than would a single child simply because there are more babies for onlookers to notice. Rather than being

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[18]Rosengarten 100.

[19]Sinclair Ross, As For Me and My House (1941; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) 6.

symbols of life and blessing, these babies are considered accusations against Cassie, perhaps even twin punishments sent by God. Whereas in a society where values still had their proper place Cassie would be commended for the responsibility she shows toward the babies by keeping them rather than putting them up for adoption, Mrs. Cameron can only condemn her for keeping the symbols of her shame in sight of her mother and the community. In her haste to tell Rachel about the unfortunate Cassie, Mrs. Cameron never for a moment thinks that her own sin of gossiping about the girl might, in God's eyes, be equal to, if not worse than, Cassie's sin of making love.

Rachel would have herself and the readers believe that she has not adopted or accepted her mother's teachings and value system. Yet this is merely one of Rachel's lies to herself. Against her will and her better judgement, she often finds herself echoing her mother's opinions and views. Djwa comments that they "resound within her own mind, metamorphosed as they are into Rachel's own overly strict superego."[20] When Rachel introduces the reader to Calla, she says,

> If only she looked a little more usual....Well, poor Calla - it isn't her fault that she has no dress sense. I look quite smart in comparison.
> Oh God. I don't mean to be condescending. How can it happen still, this echo of my mother's voice. (3-4)

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[20]Djwa 45.

During her first conversation with Nick, Rachel finds herself thinking, "Who does he think he is? High School or not. Nestor Kazlik's son. The milkman's son" (64). Rachel seems amazed to find herself having these thoughts: "It can't be myself thinking like that. I don't believe that way at all. It's as though I've thought in Mother's voice" (64). Readers watching Rachel's prim ways and listening to her disclosures of inner guilt know, even if Rachel does not, that much as she scorns Mrs. Cameron's ways of thinking, her mother's code of ethics and morality has, to a large extent, become Rachel's own. Both Rachel and her mother are, as Rachel says, "bounded by trivialities" (82).

As was evident in As For Me and My House, the demand for absolute conformity is another effect of adherence to a stern system of religious thought and practice and the man-made strictures that spring from it. It is considered necessary for individuals to conform to the standards that have been set down so that they will run no risk of stepping outside the imposed boundaries of good taste and moral conduct, thus offending the community and bringing shame on themselves. Denyse Forman and Uma Parameswaran write that

> Rachel draw[s her] lineage from Scottish clans and men...who are proud of their White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant heritage....In an isolated community such as Manawaka, the watchword is conformity. Anyone who does not conform to the established code is cast into a limbo of social ostracism. Inevitably, this code of behaviour entails a repression of the life force. Feelings are replaced by pseudo-intellect and shallow

rationalizations.[21]

It is because of the community's insistence on conformity that Rachel has an abnormal fear of being thought foolish and of being in the presence of others who are thought so. Sitting in the Tabernacle with Calla, she thinks,

> How can anyone bear to make a public spectacle of themselves? How could anyone display so openly? I will not look. I will not listen. People should keep themselves to themselves - that's the only decent way. (35)

So obsessed with appearances is Rachel that she can scarcely function within the day-to-day world. On her way to meet Calla at the Tabernacle, she looks in the store windows in an attempt to assess herself and make sure she meets the standards set for her. Mrs. Cameron's position on making a good appearance is summed up in her remarks to her husband: "'It isn't very nice, Niall, for a man in your position not to go [to church]'" (41). "'Everyone goes [to the Armistice Day parades], Niall - it looks so peculiar, for you not to'" (56). Rachel has learned from her mother that doing that which is not "nice" or which appears "peculiar" is the ultimate sin.

In this novel, as in <u>As For Me and My House</u>, insistence on conformity has led to the erection of social barriers. Early in the text, Rachel points out the class lines that exist in the town:

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[21]Forman and Parameswaran 240.

> I turn at River Street and walk past the quiet dark brick houses, too big for their remaining occupants, built by somebody's grandfathers who did well long ago out of a brickworks or the first butcher shop....This is known as a good part of town. Not like the other side of the tracks, where the shacks are and where the weeds are let grow knee-high and not dutifully mown, and where a few bootleggers drive new Chevrolets on the strength of home-made red biddy....I don't know what it's like now. Half my children live at that end of town. I never go there, and know it only from hearsay, distorted local legend, or the occasional glimpse from a child's words. (10-11)

Mrs. Cameron confirms the fact that the social barriers of Manawaka are solidly in place. Rachel recalls her mother saying, "'Don't play with those Galician youngsters'" (63) and notes that she always said "Galician or Bohunk" (63), never Ukrainian. Rachel, however, does see that her mother is not totally responsible for the prejudice she feels:

> It's not her fault. Half the town is Scots descent and the other half is Ukrainian. Oil, as they say, and water....The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God. She was brought up that way, and my father too.... (65)

Rachel's defense of her mother may be correct, but the important thing is that the barriers do exist, no matter what the reason. Kenneth Hughes writes, "Characteristic of her [Mrs. Cameron's] Victorian conservatism is an equally Victorian racism which assumes certain others to be naturally inferior.[22]

Such attitudes and barriers between people are indicative of the distance between the views of the residents of

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[22]Hughes 48.

Manawaka and the Gospel taught by Christ. Jesus' command to "'love your neighbour as yourself'" (Matt. 22:39) is ignored in Manawaka, just as it was ignored in Horizon. On the subject of equality, Paul writes in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Social barriers such as those erected in Manawaka are as foreign to true Christian thought as are the other values that have been adopted by Mrs. Cameron and her fellow townspeople. The presence of such dividing lines indicates that the Christianity practised in Manawaka is largely devoid of the charity and concern for others that Jesus called for in His followers. It is, in part, to point out the need for the adoption of values similar to those presented in the New Testament that Margaret Laurence has made Manawaka a cruelly divided town.

The barriers that exist in Manawaka lead to difficulties in communication between the various groups there. Part of the difficulty lies in the fact that the Manawakan middle class has been taught to hold in all emotion. As Calla says when she explains the gift of tongues to Rachel, "'We hold ourselves too tightly these days, that's the trouble'" (26-27). In various interviews, Laurence has stated that she feels communication between human beings is of great importance:

> It's partly that I feel that human beings ought to be able, _ought_ to be able to communicate and touch

> each other far more than they do, and this human loneliness and isolation, which obviously occurs everywhere, seems to me to be part of man's tragedy. I'm sure one of the main themes in all my writings in [sic] this sense of man's isolation from his fellows and how almost unbearably tragic this is.[23]

Repression of emotion and difficulty in communication such as are found in Manawaka must necessarily lead to an intense sense of isolation. One of the most striking instances of this in the novel is the relationship, or one might say the lack of a relationship, between Rachel and Lennox Cates. Sitting in the Tabernacle, Rachel muses about how she stopped seeing this man:

> We didn't have enough in common, I thought, meaning I couldn't visualize myself as the wife of a farmer, a man who'd never even finished High School....I've taught three of his children. All nice-looking kids...and all bright. (31)

Rachel has been the victim of social discrimination here. There could, she believed, be no meeting of the minds between a school teacher and an uneducated farmer. Could Rachel and Lennox have talked honestly with each other, they would have found out that the priority for each was having a family, and Rachel might have had the children for whom she yearns.

Human isolation that is the result of a failure to cross racial barriers is graphically illustrated in the case of Lee Toy, the owner of the Regal Café. Rachel admits that she knows very little about Lee Toy, who "has been here ever

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[23]Cameron 105.

since I was a child, and he seemed old than." She comments that "He has spent most of his life here, but in a kind of secrecy, living alone in the rooms above the café," and she speculates on Lee Toy's isolation from his wife "for more than forty years" (55). None of the townspeople have done anything to ease Lee Toy's loneliness. Rachel explains that an everyday Coca-Cola poster hangs on the wall of the café, but beside it "there hangs a painting, long and narrow like an unrolled scroll, done on grey silk - a mountain, and on the slope a solitary and splendidly plumaged tiger" (55). The painting speaks of the dreams and beauty that may, in fact, have been part of Lee Toy's life, but its message is hidden from the majority of the people in Manawaka. Lee Toy lives in silent isolation, and both he and the townsfolk lose the great benefits that might have come from mutual communication and human contact.

Manawaka and the religion it embraces have fostered very un-Christian thoughts and feelings in Rachel. She is resentful toward her sister, Stacey, because Stacey has moved to Vancouver and thus, in Rachel's eyes, managed to escape small-town repression. Rachel's resentment shows itself when Mrs. Cameron receives a letter from her daughter and talks to Rachel about Stacey's faithfulness in writing despite her heavy family responsibilities. Rachel thinks to herself, "Considering that Stacey does nothing else for Mother, writing once a week doesn't seem such an exorbitant

effort" (21). Resentment is also evident in Rachel's attitude toward her mother and Mrs. Cameron's bridge night:

> I could have gone to Willard's for dinner. I could have gone with Calla. I wish I had. Now that it comes to it, I do not know why I didn't, one or the other.
>
> It's her only outlet, her only entertainment. I can't begrudge her. Anyone decent would be only too glad. (15)

Later in the novel, Rachel identifies her feelings about her mother when she thinks, "Mean. I am" (114).

Rachel has also, like several of the characters in As For Me and My House, developed a very unscriptural pride. Valerie Miner quotes Laurence as saying that all her characters have a Scots Presbyterian pride which "makes it difficult to reach out and touch people,"[24] and in an interview with Graeme Gibson Laurence explained,

> Rachel's hang-up in a sense was very similar to Hagar's [in The Stone Angel], although it was very, very concealed. Because anyone who is desperately afraid of having human weaknesses, although they feel very unself-confident, as Rachel did, is in fact suffering from spiritual pride.[25]

It is clear that very few of the concepts of New Testament Christianity are practised in Manawaka. In their fervour to fulfill the conditions of the rigid laws that have been established, either by God or by man, the descendants of Manawaka's Scots-Presbyterian founders have fos-

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[24]Valerie Miner, "Matriarch of Manawaka," Saturday Night 89 (1974): 19.

[25]Graeme Gibson, "Margaret Laurence" in Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Anansi, 1973) 202.

tered a cold and demanding, yet comfortless, religion. Sandra Djwa points out that in the work both of Margaret Laurence and of Sinclair Ross there is "a sense of the ironic discrepancy between the spirit and the letter of the religious dispensation."[26] The apostle Paul writes in Galatians, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22-23). Manawaka is, however, a spiritual desert. There is a great deal of "law," and in view of this, there is little such "fruit" to be seen.

In _As For Me and My House_ there was little evidence of the abundant life promised by Jesus in John 10:10, and this abundant life is also noticeably absent from _A Jest of God_. To emphasize this point, Laurence fills the novel with images of death and sterility. Rachel and her mother live over a funeral home, and, Rachel says, Mrs. Cameron "almost yearns for funerals" (80); readers are told that Niall Cameron was more interested in the dead than in the living; Rachel compares the Tabernacle to "some crypt" (31); she picks flowers in the cemetery, and just prior to lovemaking, Nick draws her attention to that same cemetery; Mrs. Cameron and Rachel live in fear that the former will have a fatal heart attack. Looking at all the images of death that Margaret Laurence has used to describe Manawakan society,

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[26]Djwa 44.

readers familiar with the New Testament may be reminded of Jesus' words to the Pharisees, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead _men's_ bones and all uncleanness" (Matt. 23:27), words that Laurence may well have had in mind as she wrote this novel. In this sterile and joyless world, Calla's canary refuses to sing, and the child Rachel believes she has conceived turns out to be a benign tumour. The seriously ill Mrs. Cameron "in her new flowered-silk coat" walking "like a butterfly released from winter" (40) is an apt symbol of the majority of Manawakan residents who, although they may keep up appearances, are actually caught in what David Blewett refers to as "the 'nightmare life-in-death' vision of _Manawaka_" in which "the quality of lives where orderliness, exalted into a code of exclusiveness called respectability, leads to a denial of life."[27] In such a setting, words of joy like Calla's "'_Hallelujah_'" (135) are few.

As the residents of Manawaka divorce themselves further and further from biblical principles, they become more and more firmly entrenched in this deathlike existence in which "'the joy of the Lord'" (Neh. 8:10) has no place. One of the reasons the religious residents of the town believe so

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[27]David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle," _Journal of Canadian Studies_ 13.3 (1978): 33, 34.

adamantly in "the golden city" is that the promise of splendid future rewards is absolutely essential if the citizens of such a place are to survive in their stark and colourless existence. Besides being referred to in the children's skipping rhyme that begins the novel, this belief is also part of the solo Tom Gillanders sings in the United Church, and it is even the theme of Hector Jonas' favourite song in the repertoire included with his new organ.

Such a belief in "the golden city," heaven or the New Jerusalem, is, it is true, founded on information given in Scripture. Revelation 21:18 says, "and the city was pure gold, like clear glass." There is, however, danger in clinging to this idea as desperately as do the middle-class residents of Manawaka. Such a total focus on a secure and happy future after death acts as a kind of drug that lulls these people into accepting without question the religious and social concepts to which the town subscribes. The belief in "the golden city" tends to nullify any possibility of social action on the part of most of the Christians in Manawaka.

As well, the belief in eternal joy may be partially responsible for fostering the pattern of life already noted that suggests that death is more to be desired than life. This belief has emerged in large part because the residents of the town have convinced themselves that death is something other than it really is. Rachel explains,

> No one in Manawaka ever dies, at least not on this side of the tracks. We are a gathering of immortals. We pass on, through Calla's divine gates of topaz and azure, perhaps, but we do not die. Death is rude, unmannerly, not to be spoken to in the street. (13)

This denial of the reality of death is also evident in the rewording of the sign outside the funeral home. In the time of Rachel's father, "Cameron's Funeral Parlour" became "Cameron Funeral Home" (13), an indication that Niall Cameron was moving ahead with the times and adopting up-to-date phraseology. By the time the novel opens, Hector Jonas has changed the sign to read "Japonica Funeral Chapel" (13), a less personal designation. At the end of the novel, the sign reads simply "Japonica Chapel" (200). Any association with death has been disguised. The funeral home could be any small church.[28] It appears that in holding fast to the traditional Christian idea of "the golden city," many of the residents of Manawaka who profess to be Christian have rejected all the practical aspects of death as well as of life.

Jacob, Calla's songless canary, is an apt symbol of the Manawaka Christians. He is trapped in his "large gilt cage" (136), just as they are trapped in their narrow idea of Christianity and their dreams of future reward. There is no joy for them in their golden dream. In the same way Jacob

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[28]The fact that the Japonica Chapel could be mistaken for a church is ironic when one considers that much of the religion in Manawaka is, in fact, dead and could only properly be practised in a place of death.

climbs up and down the ladder in his cage, they continue to march up and down the spiritual ladder, hoping to attain their goal. Unlike the Jacob in the Old Testament story who wrestled with God in human form until he won the blessing he desired, these people make no active attempt to obtain the full blessings of God. Like Jacob the canary, who does not appear even to try to sing and thus capture the joy that Calla thinks could be his, many of the people in Manawaka make no effort to bring the heavenly kingdom closer to earth. They prefer to live in their dreams and are, as Calla says of her canary, a "'Dead loss'" (137).

In the course of A Jest of God, Laurence, like Ross, presents several alternatives to the rigid brand of Christianity with which Rachel grew up and which she has consequently tried to reject. The first of these is, of course, the atheism of Niall Cameron that has already been discussed and found to offer no satisfactory answers to the problems faced by Rachel and the townspeople. Another alternative is the socially acceptable and fashionably liberal kind of Christianity practised in the United Church attended by Mrs. Cameron. The attitude of many of the Christians in this church is personified by Rachel's mother: "Going to church is a social occasion for her" (39). In the United Church, Christianity is professed but not practised. George Bowering writes, "Mrs. Cameron goes to church every

Sunday morning and there is nothing there."[29]

Once again, surface appearances and surface commitment are what count among the members of the United Church. This is confirmed as Rachel describes her mother's exaggerated concern about the colour of the scarf Rachel wears to church. Rachel is a victim of this kind of superficiality when, not daring to tell her mother she "could not actually recall a time when He [God] was alive" for her, she tells Mrs. Cameron that she doesn't "agree with everything" (39). Rather than suggesting to Rachel that she should search for principles and doctrines with which she can agree, Mrs. Cameron tells her daughter, as she told her husband when he was alive, "'I don't think it would be very nice, not to go. I don't think it would look very good'" (39).

Rather than prefacing the service with prayer and private worship, Mrs. Cameron "flicks through the Hymnary to look up the hymns in advance" (40), a traditional, yet meaningless, task. Rachel takes the time before the service to muse about Mrs. Cameron's faith. Even at this point in the novel, Rachel doubts the strength of her mother's beliefs and wonders whether or not Mrs. Cameron believes anything. Rachel supposes that "she takes it for granted that she believes" (41). Mrs. Cameron's faith must be seen as lukewarm at best, however, for Rachel notes that in the Cameron

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[29]George Bowering, "That Fool of a Fear: Notes on A Jest of God," Canadian Literature 50 (1971): 45.

home one's faith "was not a subject for discussion" (41).

With respect to As For Me and My House Sandra Djwa says,

> Because the "well-bred Christianity" of the Bentleys is empty form without spirit, it emerges as a modern form of paganism in which the social conventions of a faith are perverted into a substitution for faith itself.[30]

The same accusation could be made against the Manawaka United Church and its members. The message of Christ to the Laodicean church of Revelation seems written specifically for the United Church as it is described in this novel: "'So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth'" (Rev. 3:16). God, in accordance with His Word, could not possibly be pleased with "what passes for the Christian religion in Manawaka."[31]

The well-established United Church has the appearance of spiritual strength and life, but it is actually weak and drained of all spiritual power.[32] It is a false representative of Christianity, for the whole Gospel is not preached there, just the parts that will make its members feel comfortable. Rachel speculates, based on what she has observed of her mother's deep concern with correct and muted appearances, that Mrs. Cameron "would be shocked to the core" if

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[30]Djwa 44.

[31]Hughes 43.

[32]Once again, as in As For Me and My House, the words of 2 Timothy 3:5 may be applied. The United Church has "a form of godliness but [denies] its power."

Reverend MacElfrish "should suddenly lose his mind and speak of God with anguish or joy, or out of some need should pray with fierce humility as though God had to be there" (41). Such outbursts of feeling are frowned on and avoided by middle-class Manawaka, especially in its most modern and liberal church. Rachel's statement, "Luckily, it will never happen" (41), seems likely to be true based on the sermon topic Reverend MacElfrish chooses:

> ...he is careful not to say anything which might be upsetting. His sermon deals with Gratitude. He says we are fortunate to be living here, in plenty, and we ought not to take our blessings for granted. Who is likely to quibble with that? (41)

There is no power in such a sermon. It is "as smooth and mellifluous" (41) as the minister's voice.

Rachel observes that the congregation of the United Church has good taste in furnishing its church simply but expensively with "beautifully finished" wood and "Nothing ornate - heaven forbid" (41). This attests to the middle- to upper-class status of most of the members of the congregation. The United Church is not the all-inclusive institution Christ seemed to be calling for as He ministered to men and women on all layers of the social strata. Rachel notes that even the stained-glass window with its scene of the crucifixion has been modified so as not to offend good taste. She tells readers that the window depicts

> a pretty and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain, just this nice and slightly effeminate insurance salesman who, somewhat incongruously,

> happens to be clad in a toga, holding his arms languidly up to something which might in other circumstances have been a cross. (41)

Kenneth Hughes comments that "the passion of Christ has been neutralized, presumably on the grounds that passion is a threat to the best of all possible worlds for it is the preserve of those wild people over the tracks."[33] The "other circumstances" Rachel mentions would, one assumes, involve a church where the congregation accepted the Gospel story of Christ's sacrifice as truly having significance in their lives and practised in their entirety the principles advocated in New Testament Scripture.

The reader may be tempted to think that Rachel's description of Christ as "slightly effeminate" and ineffectual is a product of her own sexual frustrations and spiritual discontent, and this may, in part, be true. It soon becomes clear, however, that in this church, Christ truly has been reduced to a mere figurehead. The bold principles of love and consideration for one's fellows that are part of the New Testament have been forgotten here, if they were ever known. Rachel says of Mrs. Cameron that "she believes absolutely that she never speaks ill of anyone or harmfully to a soul" (40). Mrs. Cameron, however, does irreparable damage to those about whom she speaks. Rachel notes, "Her weapons are invisible, and she would never admit even to carrying them, much less putting them to use" (41). In the

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[33]Hughes 43.

interests of decorum and decent behaviour during worship, Mrs. Cameron is unwilling to tolerate the ancient Tom Gillanders' efforts in the choir. It is selfish embarrassment that causes Rachel and her mother to "squirm" (42) as Tom sings about "Jerusalem the golden/ with milk and honey blest" (42). Mrs. Cameron pronounces Tom's performance "a disgrace" (43), and Rachel agrees. Rachel, however, tells readers that she is "inexplicably angry at this agreement" (43). Such an admission from Rachel would seem to act as a signpost indicating Laurence's view on the matter. The Camerons' evaluation of Tom's performance is certainly an uncharitable one. Jesus taught, "'Judge not, that you be not judged'" (Matt. 7:1). The principle of not sitting in judgement on one's fellows can be extended to apply not only to those who are committing sin, but also to those whose actions, like Tom Gillanders', appear foolish to onlookers.

The view of the United Church presented in this novel is based to a large extent on the perceptions and attitudes of Rachel and her mother. It might be argued that the church as a whole is more charitable than they are. After all, Tom Gillanders has been allowed to sing. Given Reverend MacElfrish's desire not to upset his people, however, it seems likely that Rachel's explanation of that situation is correct: "'Well, he's been in the choir such a long time. Mr. MacElfrish doesn't like to say no, I guess'" (42). Rachel also tells readers about the Dukes family who

brought their mongoloid son to church. She says of the experience,

> those Sundays were a torment as pure as anything I've known since. He would talk aloud, in a high slurred voice, all through the service, but still they'd stay, on and on, and wouldn't leave unless he started saying swear words. Or even worse. *I got to pee, Mama*. And everyone would sit with burning faces, pretending they hadn't heard. (42-43)

The silence and the pretense of the congregation offered the Dukes neither comfort nor much-needed help with their problem. According to Rachel, no Christian compassion of any kind was held out to this family. It seems safe to assume that the congregation who sat "with burning faces" (43) would have shared Rachel's desire to see the family leave the church as soon as possible, thus removing the embarrassing situation from their midst. Even making allowances for Rachel's subjective interpretation, the United Church in Manawaka hardly seems to be a place filled with warm, Christian charity and the strict adherence demanded by Christ to the principles of love and service He taught.[34]

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[34]For example, Christ told his followers,

> "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:
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> "'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;
>
> "'I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'
>
> "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give *You* drink?

The liberal thinkers in the United Church have revised the stern religion brought to Manawaka by its founders. They have removed the concept of a powerful, authoritarian God that was part of this religion, but the revision has not been a successful one for the United Church has retained much of what was harmful in the old beliefs. Tom Gillanders still sings of "the Golden City," and there is still a denial of death in the portrait of Jesus, who dies "gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain" (43). The episode with the Dukes family proves that the congregation is unable or unwilling to hold out tangible help to those who are in distress. Members like Mrs. Cameron are still enslaved to the ideas of conformity, and emotional expressions of faith are still frowned upon. What separates the Manawaka United Church from its predecessors is the complete absence of Divine power of any kind. This makes it useful only as a social meeting place, not as a place of spiritual refreshment. The United Church holds no answers for Rachel, and so graphic is Margaret Laurence's description of this church that one suspects that she, too, has rejected such a false and superficial practice of

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"'When did we see You a stranger and take <u>You</u> in, or naked and clothe <u>You</u>?

"'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'

"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did <u>it</u> to one of the least of these My brethren, you did <u>it</u> to Me.'" (Matt. 25:34-40)

Christianity.

In opposition to the United Church, spiritual home of the Manawaka middle class, is the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn. If the United Church and its members typify the idea of "form without spirit," the Tabernacle might be said to represent spirit without form. Sitting in the United Church, Rachel draws a comparison between the two churches: "The Tabernacle has too much gaudiness and zeal, and this has too little" (41).

Laurence may seem, at least at first, to be somewhat sympathetic to fundamentalist religion. This impression comes partly from the fact that she makes the non-conforming and good-hearted Calla an ardent member of the Tabernacle's congregation. With so many instances of repression and images of death in the novel, Calla, whom Rachel describes as "a sunflower, if anything, brash, strong, plain, and yet reaching up in some way" (9), is a welcome addition to Laurence's cast of characters. Rachel and her mother dislike Calla "speaking in a clarion voice about [her] beliefs" (26), but readers may find such openness infinitely preferable to Mrs. Cameron's silence about her faith. "'For me,'" Calla explains about the Tabernacle, "'it's the rock of my soul'" (10). The initial sympathy readers may feel for Calla's church, where people have been loosed from the modern-day bondage of, as Calla says, "'hold[ing] ourselves too tightly'" (27) is, however, short-lived.

One may, at first glance, respect the Tabernacle because it seems to be more democratic and open to all residents of Manawaka than is the middle-class United Church. In the Tabernacle, Rachel sees a man with "large-knuckled hands" and a "brick red" (30) neck whom she judges to be a farmer. She also sees "Alvin Jarret, who works at the bakery, and old Miss Murdoch from the bank" (32). The Tabernacle would seem to be a spiritual home for working people, for misfits like Calla, and for those from "the other side of the tracks" (11). In ministering almost totally to these people, however, the Tabernacle is as exclusive, in its own way, as is the United Church in its ministry.

It should be noted that although Calla is good-hearted, there is no guarantee that the other members of the Tabernacle show any more Christian love and compassion than do the members of the United Church. When she spots Mrs. Pusey, "ancient arch-enemy of [her] mother," in the congregation, Rachel characterizes the woman as having a "tongue like a cat-o'-nine tails" (32). Such a statement suggests that lasting grudges are borne against others and verbal damage is done to them by some of those who attend the Tabernacle. The United Church is not unique in having such persons in its midst. The pure love spoken of by John when he wrote, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God" (1 John 4:7) is missing in large part from both

these institutions.

In the same way that the United Church and its furnishings stand out as neat and tasteful examples of middle-class values, so the Tabernacle stands out as a mockery of order and good taste. It proudly refutes all the values by which the members of the United Church live. Rachel says of the worship services at the Tabernacle,

> They sing the hymns like jazz, and people rise to testify, and I was so mortified I didn't know which way to look. How can they make fools of themselves like that, so publicly? (9-10)

As Rachel approaches the Tabernacle, she describes the building in the following way:

> ...the old olive-green house stands, high and angular, encrusted with glassed-in porches, pillars with no purpose, wrought-iron balconies never likely to have been used except in the height of summer, a small turret or two for good measure, and the blue and red glass circle of a rose-window at the very top. It was built by some waistcoated gent who made good, and then made tangible his concept of paradise in this house....The sign extends the full width of the house, and is well lighted. The crimson words are plain to see. (29)

The Tabernacle is an example of decay and outmoded extravagance as well as of the "ornate" (41) that has been carefully excluded from the United Church. The people who worship at the Tabernacle are no closer to the simplicity and single-minded devotion to Christ called for in the New Testament than are those who worship in the neighbouring sanctuary.

Inside, the Tabernacle appears drab and uninspiring.

Rachel points out that the seats are

> the same straight, thickly varnished chairs one used to find in every school auditorium, but replaced there now with lighter ones which can be stacked up, and the old ones probably sold to establishments such as this. (30)

Her description of the walls is subjective when she says that they are "greenish blue, not the clear blue of open places but dense and murky, the way the sea must be, fathoms under" (30). Still, even excluding her comparison to the sea, the reader has an impression, merely from the colour, of a dim, badly-painted institutional sort of room. Rachel intensifies this impression when she describes the "two [bare] ceiling bulbs" which, she supposes, "can't be more than forty watts" making the light seem "distant and hazy" (31).

In her description of the Tabernacle, Laurence combines elements of at least two different Christian denominations. The evangelistic flavour of the lyrics of the hymns, the use of various instruments, the presence of a lay preacher, and the free use of glossolalia suggest a branch of the Pentecostal faith. The picture of Jesus with a bleeding heart, the ornately carved pulpit, the white velvet pulpit cloth with silver tassels, and the gold-covered Bible all suggest Roman Catholicism. The combination of elements from two such diverse branches of the Christian religion contributes to an impression of confusion, an impression that reaches its climax during the actual speaking in

tongues. To Rachel, the observer, the whole service seems a celebration of confusion. Her thoughts mirror the unscriptural disorder in the Tabernacle:

> Celebrate confusion. Let us celebrate confusion. God is not the author of confusion but of peace. What a laugh. Let the Dionysian women rend themselves on the night hills and consume the god. (36)

Kenneth Hughes notes that Dionysus was "the irrational god of the dispossessed in ancient Greece" and says of the worship in the Tabernacle, which Rachel equates with a Dionysian celebration, that it is "irrational Christianity."[35]

Before the service begins, Rachel asks herself,

> Will there be ecstatic utterances and will Calla suddenly rise and keen like the Grecian women wild on the hills, or wail in a wolf's voice, or speak as hissingly as a cell of serpents? (31)

Rachel's reference to Greek excesses of worship, her comparison of the Tabernacle to "some crypt" (31), and her equation of the preacher and his congregation, when they are in prayer, to "beastmen" (32) who prey rather than pray can all be attributed, to some extent, to Rachel's own tendency to fantasize and exaggerate. When, however, she describes the words of a hymn the congregation sings as "macabre as the messengers of the apocalpyse, the gaunt horsemen, the cloaked skeletons" (32), a portion of the lyrics is actually given, and readers can judge for themselves whether or not

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[35]Hughes 43.

Rachel is exaggerating in her description:

> Day of wrath! O day of mourning!
> See fulfilled the prophet's warning!
> Heaven and earth in ashes burning! (32)[36]

The "Day of Wrath" spoken of in this hymn is a valid part of biblical prophecy. The Old Testament book of Zephaniah contains the following passage:

> The great day of the Lord is near;
> It is near and hastens quickly.
> The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter;
> There the mighty men shall cry out.
> That day is a day of wrath,
> A day of trouble and distress,
> A day of devastation and desolation
> A day of darkness and gloominess
> A day of clouds and thick darkness,
> A day of trumpet and alarm
> Against the fortified cities
> And against the high towers. (Zeph. 1:14-16)

The New Testament book of Revelation also speaks of the judgement to which God will eventually subject the wicked:

> And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the

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[36]One collection containing the hymn from which Laurence quotes is Hymns Ancient and Modern for Use in the Services of the Church, edited by William Henry Monk (London: Wm. Clowes & Sons, n.d.). On page xii of the index, "Day of Wrath" is attributed to Rev. W. J. Irons, and the following notation appears: "from the Latin (altered)." This may possibly indicate that the words are based on passages found in the old Latin versions of the Roman Catholic Masses for the Dead and for All Souls' Day, which did include the concept of "Dies Irae" although their modern English counterparts have had these references omitted. No publication date is given for Hymns Ancient and Modern, but the preface is dated 1875. Research has revealed that the hymn in question does not appear in any of several more modern collections of church music. In general, the more modern the collection, the less likely it is to include any hymn dealing with the pouring out of God's judgement on humanity.

> caves and in the rocks of the mountains,
> and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!
> "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17)

Thus, such a concept has for centuries been part of the teaching of a number of Christian denominations and is not unique to the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn. During the twentieth century, however, many churches have deleted from their hymns and teachings overt references to the dreadful day of God's judgement. Laurence's inclusion of this grim vision in her description of the Tabernacle may indicate that the members of this sect choose to focus as much on the unpleasant and morbidly sensational details of Christian belief as do the members of the United Church on the pleasant, ethereal side of Christian thought.

Spiritual truth is no more evident in the Tabernacle than it was in the United Church with its unemotional and superficial brand of Christianity. The lay preacher in the Tabernacle promises that when he reads from "'The Book of Life....All things shall be made clear, and the doubts of the doubters shall be laid low'" (33). This is an empty promise, however, for, as noted, confusion, not clarity, is the result of this service, and Rachel, the doubter, can scarcely be said to have had her doubts laid to rest. It is little wonder that the preacher depicted here cannot convince Rachel of spiritual truth, for doubt is cast on his own understanding of the Scriptures when he calls Paul a

"mild apostle" (33). Even Rachel notes his error, thinking, "What - Paul mild?" (33). This preacher is in error again in his speech to the congregation, for he chooses only those portions of Paul's teaching that suit his purpose. The preacher informs his congregation,

> "In the early church, the listeners were ecstatic. Yes, the listeners as well as those gifted by the Spirit. Thus can we all participate - yes, participate - in the joy felt and known by any one of our brothers or sisters as they experience that deep and private enjoyment, that sublime edification, the infilling of the Spirit - " (34)

He neglects to mention Paul's injunction,

> Let all things be done for edification.
> If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.
> But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. (1 Cor. 14:26-28)

Paul nowhere supports the premise that those who hear the tongues will share deeply in the speaker's enjoyment. He says, rather:

> I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.
> Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? (1 Cor. 14: 15-16)

Paul's rules for orderly exercise of the gift of tongues were meant to rid the early Church of confusion such as that which exists in the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn, and confusion is the necessary result of disregard for these Scriptural dictates. Perhaps because he really has very

little accurate knowledge of the Scriptures, this preacher chooses to read a portion of the Bible that, in fact, condemns his church and the style of worship practised there. He correctly quotes Paul as having written, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (33; cf. 1 Cor. 14:33), but this very portion of Scripture attests to the fact that what is happening in the Tabernacle is in no way connected with God, since confusion rather than peace is the result of the service there.[37]

Rachel's comparisons of the service to Greek religious rites imply that elements of paganism are involved. She compares the first man who rises to speak in tongues to "a blind seer, a younger Tiresias come to tell the king the words that no one could listen to and live" (35) and says of the listening congregation, "They can sit, rapt, wrapped around and smothered willingly by these syllables, the chanting of some mad enchanter, himself enchanted?" (35). Rachel believes that what she is hearing is "sinister foolery" (35), and the preacher makes reference to the early convert "Simon the sorcerer" (33), perhaps causing readers to wonder whether some of Simon's former arts may have remained within the particular branch of the Church repre-

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[37]Rachel gives an added dimension of falsity to this preacher when she observes, "When he says thr-ill-illing it sounds like a Technicolor movie, one of those religious epics" (33). A movie is, of course, pure illusion, and by comparing this man to an actor in a movie, Laurence, through Rachel, raises questions about the reality of anything this preacher says.

sented by the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn. Laurence suggests that forms of religion older than Christianity may be at work in the Tabernacle.

As the service proceeds, Rachel describes the lay preacher in the following way: "His arms are stretched, as though he knew there were something above and if he strained he might reach it - or else pull it down to his level" (34). The words "pull it down to his level" may indicate that supernatural forces are no longer part of this meeting at all. What began as a spiritual experience has become something engineered by human beings. This impression is enhanced by the hypnotic effect the preacher has on Rachel. She tells readers, "His voice no longer growls - it reaches out like arms of strength, to captivate" (34). Rachel also observes, "The preacher has grown in stature. He actually seems taller" (34). During the singing of a hymn, Rachel thinks, "I can't stand. I seem to be taken to my feet, born ludicrously aloft, by the sheer force and weight of the rising people on either side of me" (34). Rachel's observations of Calla also reinforce the idea that some kind of hypnosis is taking place. She notes that Calla has a "fixed and glazed" (33) look. Through Rachel's own question, Laurence indicates that her protagonist may not be an entirely accurate judge of the people surrounding her: "Around me, the people stir - uneasily?" (33). Still, Rachel's descriptions of the people and events in the

Tabernacle, as well as her final reaction to the service when she speaks and yet does not for a moment recognize her own voice, do give considerable support to the theory that Rachel, as well as a number of others in the Tabernacle, are under the influence of some sort of hypnotic power, or at least of group hysteria. Laurence does not imply that there is anything supernatural in Rachel's utterance. Rather, she suggests that what the worshippers in the Tabernacle believe is a manifestation of the gift of tongues is actually a product of Rachel's own pent-up emotions, her frustration and inner pain. As she comforts Rachel following the service, Calla says, "'I know it wasn't - well, you know - a religious experience for you'" (37). The question to be asked is whether or not this night in the Tabernacle is "a religious experience" for anyone involved. Catherine McLay writes that

> the congregation of the Tabernacle uses religion to escape from themselves and their own isolation into a relationship with those in their circle and with God. Their escape may be momentary....It may be unreal, for the speaking in tongues too is illusionary.[38]

The religion of her ancestors, the "form without spirit" of the United Church, and the spirit without form of the Tabernacle are not the only models of faith held out to Rachel. As was the case in <u>As For Me and My House</u>, this novel presents its protagonist with a wide number of choices

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[38]McLay 66-67.

to consider in this regard.

Nick gives Rachel a description of his mother who is, in his words, "'solid. Physically and spiritually'" (145). He adds, however, "'And yet in some ways she is eccentric, I suppose. Or - not so much that, just completely inner-directed" (145). Nick's slight reservation notwithstanding, Mrs. Kazlik seems to possess the kind of powerful faith that Rachel needs in her life. Nick's mother does not, apparently, subscribe to a belief system that is connected to a church and its outward trappings, nor does she adhere to beliefs governed by some human idea of morality. Her faith, it seems, is one that centres on the idea of God within the individual. At this point in Nick's description, readers may see Mrs. Kazlik's kind of faith as springing from the orthodox Christian idea that Christ does, in fact, come to live in the hearts of individuals who surrender their lives to Him.

But then Nick continues:

> "She believes in omens...which she interprets in any way that happens to suit her. She's got this marvellous belief in her own intuition. Not towards everything - only where her kids are concerned. Something magical, she thinks, given by heaven to mothers like her, the devout, those who are really bound up with their kids. She wouldn't give you fifty cents for the women who park their kids and go out to work. A spit in the face of God, she thinks. For herself, she _knows_. She knows what is going on without being told." (145)

He adds, "'Of course, like any other oracle, the times she goofs on the predictions are forgotten in the wonder of the

times she happens to be right'" (145). Mrs. Kazlik's faith, like that practised in the two churches Rachel has visited, is not the pure faith called for in Scripture. Nick's use of the words "oracle" and "magical" in describing his mother establishes a link between her kind of Christianity and the ancient pagan religions, and one is reminded of Rachel's association of the worship service at the Tabernacle with the Grecian worship of Dionysus as well as of the association of Christianity with pagan worship that was so prevalent in As For Me and My House.

Nick also tells Rachel about Nestor Kazlik's faith, saying that Nestor "'has this gargantuan faith in himself'" (89). Later, Nick adds, "'It's this fantastic way he has, of creating the world in his own image'" (142). Such a statement may remind readers of the Bentleys and Mrs. Finley who, like Nestor, tried to recreate the world and the people around them, thus ursurping the role of God.

In addition to assuming this elevated status, Nestor has made an idol of his son Steve. Like the Bentleys in As For Me and My House, he has broken the command called by Jesus "'the first and great commandment'" (Matt. 22:38), "'"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind"'" (Matt. 22:37). Nestor's hopes and faith were pinned to this son to such an extent that Nestor refuses to acknowledge his death. Nick points out, "'Three times in the last week...he's called me

Steve'" (142). The foundations upon which Nestor has built his faith and his life have been shaken. With Steve's death, his idol has been broken, and the world he has tried to create has been shattered.

Nestor does, in a sense, look to another god for deliverance from his situation when he hopes that Nick will redeem his life and dreams by assuming the place of the dead Steve and returning home to inherit the farm. Nick, however, has his own dreams and ambitions and is unwilling to abandon them to act as his father's saviour. As he tells Rachel, "'I have forsaken my house - I have left mine heritage - mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest - it crieth out against me - therefore have I hated it'" (110; cf. Jer. 12:7-8). Nestor's gods have been of his own making, and, in the same way the man-made gods in Ross's novel failed the Bentleys and their neighbours, Nestor's gods have been unable to sustain or deliver him.

Rachel copies, and embellishes, this final aspect of Nestor's faith when she entrusts her life completely to the very human Nick. Nick is the first man to hold out the promise of sexual fulfillment to Rachel, and, thus, he seems to fill the void she has sensed in her life. She believes that first a relationship with him and then motherhood will solve all her problems by providing her with an escape from the sterility she has experienced to this point in her life. Rachel believes that it is a sexual relationship, not spir-

itual fulfillment, that will be her source of abundant life.

Rachel's identification of Nick with God begins to be evident the first time she and Nick make love. Rachel cries out within herself, "Forgive me. Forgive me" (91), as if Nick can really grant her absolution for not being the woman or the lover she wants to be. After her first sexual encounter with Nick, Rachel experiences a "peace" (91) that envelops her, just as "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) is said to fill the hearts of believers who have allowed the Holy Spirit to inhabit them. George Bowering writes, "Rachel finds 'this peace, this pride', when her body is touching Nick's. They are most un-Protestant feelings for the soul."[39]

Rachel even begins to have a kind of prayer life with Nick as its object:

> Listen, Nick -
> I talk to him, when he is not here, and tell him everything I can think of, everything that has ever happened, and how I feel and for a while, it seems to me that I am completely known to him, and then I remember I've only talked to him like that when I'm alone. He hasn't heard and doesn't know. (138)

Before making love with Nick for the last time, Rachel tells readers, "I want to yield to his laughter, to have everything happening on his terms, lightly, not as though it were the beginning of the world" (144). With such a thought, she links Nick with the Creator. Rachel does, in fact, believe

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[39]Bowering 52.

that Nick is bringing about the beginning of her world. She has faith that he will create for her the life she wants and needs.

Psalm 37:4 reads, "Delight yourself also in the Lord,/ And He shall give you the desires of your heart." Rachel's faith in Nick is so strong, and she delights in him to such an extent that she does venture to ask him, in his role as her god, to fulfill this promise. Before doing so, Rachel reasons with herself much as Christians might before asking a special request of the God in whom they believe: "If one speaks from faith, not logic, how does that turn out? I do not know, except that I am so strong in it, so assured, that it cannot possibly go wrong" (148). Rachel, however, directs her faith not to God but to a mere man, and so the desire of her heart, which is couched in the tentative words, "'If I had a child, I would like it to be yours'" (148), is not granted.

The subject of truth that was examined by Sinclair Ross in As For Me and My House plays a very important part in this novel as well. The use of first-person narration and a narrator whose perceptions and accounts of people and events are open to question has already been discussed and is one of the devices that Laurence, like Ross, uses to illustrate the necessity for searching out and recognizing truth, spiritual or otherwise. Rachel gives readers a clue about the sham and pretense with which her world abounds when she says

that "long ago" in Manawakan terms means "half a century." She adds, "Nothing is old here, but it looks old" (10). Even the houses in Manawaka are not what they appear to be. Their exteriors resemble homes from an earlier era, perhaps indicating a desire on the part of their owners to assume the dignity of long-standing tradition when, in fact, the town is of relatively recent origin. This is only one of a number of suggestions made in the novel that in this fictional world many things are not as they seem.

Perplexity about what is actually true is often a problem for the characters in A Jest of God. During her last date with Nick, Rachel is confused by the photo of a little boy that Nick shows her. His word, "'Mine'" (149), used in relation to this snapshot, is a cryptic one. It can be interpreted, as it is by Rachel, to mean that the boy in the picture belongs to Nick, is, in fact, his son. It may also be taken to mean, however, that the photo is one of Nick himself. Rachel's inability to perceive the truth in this instance marks the end of her relationship with Nick and thus introduces an important turning point in her life. Again, there is a great deal of confusion between truth and fiction in the matter of Mrs. Cameron's heart condition. It is clear that Rachel's mother uses the threat of heart attack to manipulate her daughter, but Mrs. Cameron does from time to time suffer attacks serious enough so that "the skin around her mouth [is] violet" (39), a sign that her

sickness is a reality and not just a pretense used to keep Rachel at home. Even Rachel's pregnancy is part of this pattern of deceptive appearances. She tries to prepare herself to face the birth of a child when it is actually a tumour she carries.

Deception is also evident in the lives of most of the characters in this novel. In addition to being unreliable as a narrator and guide for readers, Rachel is untruthful in her dealings with other persons in the text. She is so afraid of offending someone or of violating the Manawakan social code of good manners that she often resorts to lies to save feelings and to get her out of difficult situations. Even as a child, Rachel must have been inclined to lie from time to time for she remembers her mother quoting, "Oh what a tangled web we weave/ When first we practise to deceive! (77).[40] This pattern carries over into her adult life when she tells Calla that she is taking a non-existent summer course so that she can avoid contact with her one-time friend. It is her statement to Calla that she would "love to" (10) attend the next special service at the Tabernacle that occasions Rachel's presence at the fateful service described earlier in this chapter. Rachel is also dishonest

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[40]The words Rachel's mother quotes are actually from Sir Walter Scott's Marmion, canto 6, stanza 17, lines 26-27. It is doubtful that Mrs. Cameron knows this, however. Through the years, these words have become trivialized and completely divorced from their source since they have frequently been quoted out of context and used in the same way Mrs. Cameron uses them.

with her mother, hiding the thoughts and actions she fears will give offense. When Mrs. Cameron questions Rachel's decision not to attend church, Rachel does not tell her mother about her lack of belief. She "only told her [she] didn't agree with everything" (39). Following this only partially truthful admission, Rachel acts out her deception by trudging to church each Sunday, even though she does not subscribe to the beliefs professed there.

Rachel is not alone in her tendency to avoid the truth. In fact, few, if any, of the characters in this novel are completely candid. When she finds her mother waiting up to ask questions about her date with Nick, Rachel asks if she has taken her sleeping pill. Mrs. Cameron replies, "'I forgot,'" and Rachel tells readers that her mother is "certain she's speaking the gospel truth" (114). Mrs. Cameron's regular church attendance hides her lack of belief in God and His control over her life. When Rachel suggests that God may be in control of Mrs. Cameron's health and eventual death, she comments that she had some hope that her mother "might not decently be quite able to deny some sovereignty" (194). Mrs. Cameron, however, cannot even comprehend Rachel's meaning when she is told by her daughter that her life is "'in other hands'" (194). Rachel recalls her mother "singing in a falsetto voice, the stylish tremolo, the ladies' choir voice. Bless this house dear Lord we pray, keep it safe by night and day" (19). The word "falsetto"

has an added meaning here. It is not only the range in which Mrs. Cameron sings that is false, but the prayer contained in her song has no meaning for her. She, like Mrs. Abercrombie in Who Has Seen the Wind, merely sings empty words.

Nick is equally as deceptive as are Rachel and her mother. The first time that he and Rachel make love, Rachel sees him "slithering out of his grey flannels like a snake shrugging off its last year's skin." She quickly corrects herself with the words, "No, not a snake, of course" (90), but readers familiar with the Old Testament and with Laurence's use of Scriptural allusion will already have glimpsed the comparison between Nick and the serpent that, according to the story in Genesis, deceived Eve. Sandra Djwa states,

> ...the character of Nick is dual in aspect; he is both the bringer of gifts that his name implies (St. Nicholas) but also one of the devil's party. Identified with the shadow prince of Rachel's dreams, he carries with him an inheritance of death and so cannot make a covenant of the spirit with Rachel. Picking raspberries, just before he explicitly denies Rachel, he swears "Bloody Hell. My right hand seems to have forgotten its cunning." This [is a] paraphrase of a psalm from captivity ("If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning") [Ps. 137:5]....[41]

Rachel is identified with Jerusalem, the golden city of Scripture, on the first page of the novel when she is called "queen of the golden city" (1). Besides referring to the

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[41]Djwa 48.

fact that he has indeed forgotten the "cunning" necessary to pick raspberries and has pricked himself, Nick's quotation from Psalm 137 is an indication that, even at this early point in their relationship, he is already intending to "forget" and abandon Rachel.

Even forthright Calla is in some ways a deceptive character. Calla's name is, itself, misleading. Rachel tells readers,

> Calla's mother was exceptionally fond of white lilies, and christened her only daughter after one variety of them. Calla detests her name and no wonder. Nothing less lilylike could possibly be imagined. (9)

Calla admits, when offering Rachel help, that she has "'a collection of motives like a kaleidoscope'" (176). Such a statement raises the suspicion that motives, some unknown even to Calla, may underlie most of her actions, even one as simple as giving a hyacinth to Rachel, for whom Calla later confesses a lesbian attraction.

Throughout the novel, Laurence makes a number of statements about words and how they can be inadequate and confusing, actually hiding the truth in some instances. The first time Rachel talks to Nick, she thinks, "I don't know why I take people's words at their surface value. Mine can't be taken so" (63). The endearments Mrs. Cameron lavishes on Rachel are extremely suspect. Her constant use of the term "'dear'" (14) belies the fact that she will do almost anything to get her own way, no matter how unhappy her course

of action may make Rachel. Nick's frequent use of the word "'darling'" (89) when addressing Rachel is even more false than Mrs. Cameron's "'dear.'" It carries with it none of the genuine affection supposedly inherent in such a term.

In the midst of so much duplicity, it is difficult to determine when someone is actually telling the truth. Nick says to Rachel, "'Complexities all around. Goddamn spider webs. Am I the spider or the fly?'" (141). Images of webs and deception echo again and again throughout the text warning readers to push away the various cobwebs with which they are presented in order to find the truth Margaret Laurence is attempting to reveal. She, like Sinclair Ross before her, seems to be encouraging her readers not to be satisfied with a superficial glance at people, beliefs, and situations, but to look beneath surface appearances to find what is real and of value.

In her quest to understand who God is and to find a faith that is viable for her, Rachel must sort through the numerous untruths, both those presented to her and those she has conjured up herself. Because Rachel's life is comprised of so many illusions and because she lives in a childlike state without much experience of the world, readers may be reminded of the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13: 11-12:

> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.
> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face

> to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

This verse seems particularly relevant given the fact that Rachel, in the process of brushing her hair, says, "I can't succeed in avoiding my eyes in the mirror....I don't look old. I don't look more than thirty. Or do I see my face falsely?" (16). It is the maturity and clarity of vision spoken of by Paul that Rachel must achieve. She says of the relationship between her mother and herself, "It isn't that I want to lie to her. But she invites it, even demands it. Whoever said the truth shall make you free never knew this kind of house" (100). The speaker whom Rachel cannot identify is Christ, and the full quotation to which she makes reference is "'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free'" (John 8:31-32). Rachel has looked for escape, but she has not realized that lies, deceit, and untruth have constituted many of her bonds. As she eventually discovers, recognition and acceptance of truth in all its aspects are, as Christ promised they would be, the keys to the freedom she desires.

It is the extensive examination of truth and falsity in this novel that opens the way for Rachel's, and Laurence's, assessment of the value of Christianity. If so much of the world in which Rachel lives is filled with untruth, the question arises whether the whole concept of Christianity, a concept that has been adopted, however imperfectly, by many

in that world, may not actually be fraudulent as well. There is certainly much that is false and unworthy about the forms of religion practiced in the organized churches that are depicted in this novel, but Laurence seems to imply that there may still be something of value in the Christian religion if one examines it carefully and discovers its essence. In order to find some of the truth about Christianity that Laurence wants her readers to consider, it is necessary to examine the characters and find out which ones exemplify the positive values in the novel. There are, it seems, at least two such characters in A Jest of God.

The first, Hector Jonas, is a man in the process of breaking away from the ancestors and their time-honored traditions. The previously-noted changes in the sign outside his establishment indicate this as does the addition to the funeral chapel a new "super-dooper automatic organ" (126) and the blue lights and decorative details that give the place an almost psychedelic effect. Hector seems also to have broken away from a traditional belief in God. He explains to Rachel that church funerals "'are going out'" because they "'Tend to bring up all kinds of things - heaven, hell, stuff like that....However you look at it, it's a real ordeal'" (126). The sacred selections "'Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring'" (126) and Hector's "'favourite'" (126), "There is a happy land/ Far far away" (127), are played by the new organ, but all the majesty of the first and the

Christian significance of both have been lost. These selections are turned out by a mechanical device once Hector has found the right "levers to press, magical buttons to touch" (127). Only the traditional tunes remain. The human interpretations that give musical performances their individuality and much of their significance are gone, as is any suggestion of the Divine the music might once have had. Rachel says of the ornate chapel that it has been "purged of all spirit, all spirits except the rye" (127).

In his unorthodox way, however, Hector has retained a number of the values that lie at the heart of Christianity as it is put forward in the New Testament. When Rachel seeks comfort from him late one night, Hector's original "'Can I help you?'" which, Rachel tells readers, "he says, not meaning it" (119) soon becomes a sincere desire to do something for his visitor. When Rachel makes her plea, "'Let me come in'" (119), she explains that "Hector Jonas looks puzzled only for an instant. Then, with some decision to accept without question, some exercise of faith, he smiles as though everything were ordinary" (119).

Rather than offering Rachel platitudes based on an ethereal and idealistic concept of religion, Hector makes a practical assessment of her problem. He diagnoses it as insomnia and offers Rachel what he has presumably found to be the best cure for such minor ills, a drink. The fact that Hector allows Rachel to come in and talk to him late at

night recalls the Biblical injunction, "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling" (1 Pet. 4:9). Rachel, having asked how Hector's business is, tells readers, "He looks delighted. This is his pet topic clearly. And yet he was willing to listen to anything I had to say" (121).

Hector has a love of ornate furnishings. Rachel notices, for example, that the door to his funeral establishment "looks like the door of a keep or a castle prison" (118), and she also notes that the organ has pipes "painted to resemble Corinthian columns" (126). In taste, Hector fits in well with the congregation of the Tabernacle; in his desire to spare no expense in furnishing his place of business, he is a match for the members of the United Church. Beneath his love of the ornate, however, Hector displays a refreshing candour that is not evident in those who faithfully attend these churches.

Engaged in an occupation that has as its trademark refinement, tact, and the necessity for covering up the upsetting details of death, Hector is still able to be completely honest about himself, at least in Rachel's presence. Unlike Mrs. Cameron, who gives the impression of believing in God but really has very little faith, Hector makes no pretense of subscribing to any religion. He feels no awe in relation to a God for whom he has little use, and thus his speech reflects no imitation reverence. He uses a great deal of profanity, for which he mockingly apologizes

to Rachel with the expression, "'Excuse my French'" (125). Hector is a businessman who gives people what he believes they want. Beyond that, he claims the right to live his life the way he chooses, even though he may appear vulgar to readers and to the residents of Manawaka who encounter him.

In spite of his profanity and his denial of conventional Christian beliefs and patterns of behaviour, Hector is quick to offer practical help and support to a troubled acquaintance. When he sees Rachel's tears, Hector beg "patting [Rachel's] shoulder, and making clucking noises deep in his throat" (127). He comforts her with the words, "'There, there. Never mind. It'll be all right'" (127). He even shares his most personal secret about lovemaking with Rachel, possibly so that she will not feel alone and foolish during her open display of emotion. Here is the communication, the compassion, and the reaching out to another person in trouble that was so noticeably missing from the United Church when the Dukes family attended.

With his common-sense, straightforward approach, Hector offers Rachel more help than she could have imagined he would. She has wondered for years about her father and the unhappy life she believes he led with her mother. Hector, however, tempers Rachel's illusions with reality. Because he is not bound by conventional good taste and false codes of proper behaviour, Hector is able to tell her the blunt truth. Rachel presents Hector with her version of Niall

Cameron's life: "'He drank because he was never happy'" (124). Hector, however, counters, "'I don't know that I'd entirely buy that one'" and adds, "'I would bet he had the kind of life he wanted most'" (124). Here is the truth that will at least begin to make Rachel free:

> The turning point in her [Rachel's] movement away from death and back to life occurs in the scene with Hector in the Japonica Chapel, where she relinquishes her hold upon the past and the dream of her father, not as he was but as she wanted him to be....In turning away from this, Rachel comes to accept both her father's right to his choice and his rejection of her.[42]

As the conversation between Hector and Rachel begins, Rachel has a fantasy in which she sees Hector playing the role of a strange kind of priest: "And on the high altar squats a dwarf I've never seen before" (124). Although the image is a pagan one, Hector also fulfills the function of a priest as the role is understood in Christian terms. He guides Rachel toward truth and helps her move onward in her spiritual journey. Because of Hector's words, she is no longer bound by her false conceptions of who Niall Cameron was, and she is free to abandon her pretense of atheism, realizing that she does not have to pay tribute to her father's beliefs as a way of making restitution to him for the life he missed. Hector has done for Rachel what he previously did for himself when he deleted the Cameron name from the sign outside the funeral chapel. With that ges-

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[42]McLay 65.

ture, Hector freed his business from the shadow of Niall Cameron. By exposing Rachel to the truth about his predecessor, Hector has freed her from the hold she has allowed her dead father to continue to have on her.

Having cast away even her pretense at atheism, Rachel is once again dying "For the want of the golden city" (1). As Hector plays "There is a happy land/ Far far away" (127), Rachel is aware of "the terrible corniness of that hymn" (127), and, perhaps as a lament for all she still cannot believe, she cries. This unrestrained release of emotion in the presence of another human being gives promise that Rachel will yet be able to break out of the repression that has bound her all her life. In the chapel, however, her deep-seated guilt still prods her to think, as Hector consoles her, "I don't deserve such comfort" (127). More movement toward the truth and personal freedom is required in her life, but a beginning has been made.

With her creation of Hector, Laurence shows the reader how important honesty is. It is significant that it is not one of the nominal Christians in the novel who is able to tell Rachel the truth she needs to hear and to teach her its importance in her life. Some of the values Laurence appears to consider most important, compassion, kindness, honesty about oneself, personal freedom, and practical service to one's fellows, to name a few, are revealed in Hector, a character who is definitely not "Christian" in the conven-

tional sense of the word. Laurence does, however, allow the character in A Jest of God to whom the Church means the most to continue the lessons Hector has begun to teach Racnel.

It is Calla who discovers and then attempts to reveal to Rachel the source of the basic truth of Christianity. Calla had previously been trapped in her own narrow ideas about God and the Church. It is Rachel's experience at the Tabernacle, which Calla herself realizes isn't "'a religious experience'" (37) for Rachel, that awakens her to the fact that the seemingly pious people and their practices of worship cannot always be accepted at face value. Just as Rachel's experience with tongues mimics Christian ecstasy and yet is something far different, so, Calla now understands, some of the practices and ideas she has taken for granted as being inspired by God may, in fact, be mere imitations of spirituality. Calla tells Rachel, "'After it happened - I mean, at the Tabernacle that night when you were there...I didn't go again for weeks'" (134).

Instead of going to a place where preconceived ideas about spiritual truth and proper religious behaviour are already in place, Calla goes directly to the New Testament and reads the writings of Paul for herself. She admits that she has "'only known bits of his sayings, here and there, the parts our preacher put into the mimeographed information sheets he passed around on the subject [of speaking in tongues]'" (134). Calla, like Rachel, has allowed herself

to be entrapped and her life to be governed by someone else's narrow interpretations of spiritual matters. She has been a victim of deception, however well-meant.[43] Only after reading Paul's words for herself does Calla become aware of the apostle's warnings against improper use of the gift of tongues and of his appeal for clarity in communication of spiritual truth. She quotes Paul as saying,

> "There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me." (135; cf. 1 Cor. 14:10-11)

Calla shows Rachel that the truth about God and existence does not lie in a particular church's or leader's ideas about Scripture, but in direct communication with God, in this case through the examination of His word, specifically the New Testament.

Rachel recognizes "the apostle's appallingly accurate sight" (135), but she tries to comfort Calla, telling her that perhaps Paul didn't mean the passage Calla has quoted in the way she thinks. As she reaches out to Calla in this way, Rachel herself stumbles upon another important realization about truth: "What he [Paul] says isn't what should be. It's merely what is" (135). Rachel, who has escaped

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[43]The fact that Calla helps to paint the Tabernacle walls "eggshell" (132) to replace the original murky "greenish blue" (30) is indicative of this new clarity with which Calla, in light of her explorations of Scripture, sees her experiences there.

into fantasy so often, needs to learn this fact in order to face the realities of her life. Finding it revealed in Calla's quotation from 1st Corinthians, Rachel thinks, "I don't ever remember having heard the words before, much as I was supposed to have been reared on the black leather book" (135). Rachel, like Calla in the Tabernacle, has been kept ignorant through selective editing of spiritual truth.

Calla continues to explain to Rachel the new insights she has gained from reading Paul's words, and in doing so, she acquaints Rachel with the following passage: "'If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise'" (135; cf. 1 Cor. 3:18). These words have freed Calla to participate in worship at the Tabernacle without fear of seeming foolish to those, like Rachel, who do not believe. They are also the key to freedom for Rachel, who has been bound into a life of restrictions by a fear of seeming foolish should her actions be in violation of the code of ethics established by her God-fearing ancestors.

When Calla goes on to explain to Rachel that she has spoken in tongues, there is a new awareness in her attitude. She is glad that the gift has not been given at the Tabernacle, for in that confused and misinformed assembly there would have been no interpreter, as Paul insists there must be when the speaking is public. Calla has realized how important it is to follow the dictates of Scripture precise-

ly if one truly wishes to experience the blessing of God. She has been, to some extent, like the men and women of Horizon who assumed false roles based on an inaccurate reading of Paul's epistles. Calla has also come to a new realization that, regardless of the mode of one's public profession of faith, a true experience of God must be personal. God reveals Himself to a person in the way he or she needs to know Him most. She has finally found the "peace" (136) promised her by the pastor of the Tabernacle. As Calla speaks, it is apparent that this peace is very different from the short-lived kind Rachel felt after making love with Nick. Calla has experienced her God, not created Him.

Although Calla cannot make Rachel understand all of her words, she does manage to communicate to Rachel some of this new-found peace. Listening to her, Rachel thinks,

> She has left me behind. I'm not following her. And yet I'm not so much frightened, not any more. It won't happen to me. I won't become eccentric, moving in some private pattern only, speaking oddities which seem quite usual to me and otherwise to others - hilarious to the cruel, terrifying to the slightly more observant. (136)

There is, it seems, something of value for Rachel in the lessons from the New Testament that Calla is trying to teach her. Rachel, however, has to learn to listen more closely and in a new way and to open herself to the information that is being held out to her.

In addition to allowing her to provide the key to deeper spiritual understanding for Rachel, and for readers as

well, Laurence has made Calla her chief representative of the principles of genuine Christianity. Calla has not only read the New Testament, she has worked hard to make its message an integral part of her life. Rachel's experience with Calla expands the idea established during her visit to Hector that compassion and real, practical care for one's fellow human beings are more important than mere church attendance and empty religious form.

When Rachel believes that she is pregnant, she is unable to turn for help to any of the upright, respectable, middle-class Christians in Manawaka. Rachel has heard her mother's gossip about Cassie Stewart and knows that Mrs. Cameron and those like her feel that Cassie's situation is "'dreadful'" and "'a heartbreak'" (58). When Rachel takes her problem to Calla, however, the latter's response is instant, sympathetic, and practical. Calla, seeing Rachel's need, immediately forgives Rachel for avoiding her for so long, for lying to her, even for rejecting her profession of love. Thus, Calla fulfills Christ's command to practise unlimited forgiveness. Jesus told Peter, "'I do not say to you, [forgive] up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven'" (Matt. 18:22).

Calla offers Rachel comfort without judgement. She tells Rachel,

> "I don't know what it is, and if you don't want to say, then okay. But if you want to say, then I'll listen, whatever it is. And whatever it is, if you need to get away sometimes, you can

> always come here. I won't ask any questions." (175)

Unprepared for and disbelieving the promise of such magnanimous treatment, Rachel asks Calla, "'How can you say that? Wouldn't you make any conditions?'" Calla responds with all the honesty she can: "'You mean, what would I ask from you? I don't know. I hope I wouldn't ask anything. But I can't guarantee. I'd try - that's all'" (175). Calla's attempts at honest answers are in refreshing contrast to Rachel's former easy agreements to go along with almost anything which were followed by her complaints about having to comply with promises made on the basis of false enthusiasm.

Calla has incorporated into her life the command given in the book of James: "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (Jas. 1:22). James' definition of true religion has become Calla's: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). Rachel, when she comes seeking Calla's help, is as forlorn and alone as any orphan or widow. The assurance, so dear to the hearts of middle-class Christians in Manawaka, that she will someday reach the "golden city" would be of little use to Rachel in her situation. She needs comfort and aid grounded solidly in reality, the kind of comfort and aid called for by James and supplied by Calla. Beginning by offering Rachel Kleenex, a cigarette, coffee, and later, a drink, Calla goes

on to offer her a total commitment of herself. Jesus said, "'Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends'" (John 15:13). In fact, the whole Gospel message is based on the ideal of sacrificial love. Calla puts this principle into action as she, in effect, offers to sacrifice her own life by devoting herself totally to Rachel and her child, even if it means leaving everything behind and moving with them away from Manawaka:

> "You could move in here, if you wanted. Or if you wanted to move away entirely, beforehand - well, there isn't any reason why I couldn't move, if you wanted someone by you....As for the baby, well, my Lord, I've looked after many a kid before." (175)

Writing about Margaret Laurence's use of Calla, a kind of lily, as a name for this character, Clara Thomas says that Laurence uses the name symbolically since Calla "was willing to extend her love for Rachel to an Easter sacrifice."[44]

The skeptic might point out that Calla, who has earlier revealed her love for Rachel, may be offering such help from purely selfish motives, hoping that once the baby is born, a lesbian relationship will develop between Rachel and herself. In fact, Calla herself realizes that her offer of help may, in some ways, be self-seeking. She tells Rachel,

> "You think you're not asking anything of someone, and then it appears you're asking everything. To take over. I didn't mean to."
>
> ...
>
> "I don't know what I can say or offer to do. Nothing much, I guess. Except that I'm here, and

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[44]Clara Thomas, "The Wild Garden and the Manawaka World," Modern Fiction Studies 22.3 (1976): 411.

> you'll know, yourself, what you need to ask." (176)

When Rachel tries to thank her, Calla pushes the attempt away: "'Don't bother,' she interrupts. 'It's for nothing. I've got a collection of motives like a kaleidoscope - click! and they all look different'" (176). Calla admits to having her own motives for her charitable offers, but having realized this about herself, she is willing to put all her interests and dreams of happiness aside in order to adopt the course of action that is best for Rachel.

Rachel does feel comforted by Calla. When Calla asks her if she will be all right, Rachel thinks,

> If I'd been asked that, yesterday, I wouldn't have known. Maybe even an hour ago I wouldn't have known.
>
> "Yes. I'm going to be all right."
>
> Maybe she'll pray for me, and maybe, even, I could do with that. But she hasn't said so, and she won't, and that is an act of great tact and restraint on her part. (176)

By translating her faith into action and omitting the preaching, Calla has shown Rachel the real essence of Christianity, and Rachel is beginning, as her comment about prayer reveals, to let down the guard that has protected her for so long against the acceptance of God and faith.

Calla demonstrates this same "tact and restraint" when she brings Rachel back from the hospital. Rachel realizes that, in addition to the practical assistance Calla gives her by providing transportation, Calla sacrifices her curiosity and gives her the gift of silence. Calla keeps her

opinions, as well as her need to mother Rachel, to herself:

> She didn't fuss or treat me like an invalid, the way some people might have done....No, she simply said, "You won't want to talk much, I expect," and for the three whole hours we hardly said a word. I wanted to thank her for this gift, which had cost her something, but I could not seem to clarify my mind enough to decide what could be said and what could not. (185)

Again Calla demonstrates the kind of selfless service that is called for in the New Testament.

Although Calla calls herself a Christian and actively demonstrates the principles of Christianity, she is a "sinner" in the traditional sense of the word. She reveals lesbian tendencies, and homosexuality is condemned in Scripture.[45] Calla also offers Rachel both a cigarette and, as Hector did before her, a drink, even though smoking and drinking are habits frowned on by the stricter Christian denominations. With her creation of Calla, and also of Hector, Laurence seems to be saying that although the basic values of Christianity may be in short supply in many organized churches, they are often held by those who, according to the opinions of many church members, are

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[45]See, for example, the following verses:

> "'You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It _is_ an abomination.'" (Lev. 18.22)
>
> For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature.
> Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (Rom. 1:26-27)

sinners and social outcasts. When worry about appearances and codes of behaviour has been cast aside, there is room to concern oneself more deeply with the things that are truly significant both in the spiritual realm and in the area of human relationships.

It is apparent that Margaret Laurence attaches slight value to the judgements made by the traditional churches and their members about the character of sin. Throughout this novel, she points out that the real sins are those that harm others - censure, gossip, dishonesty, entrenchment in a system of closed thought - all of which occur frequently, according to Laurence, within organized churches.

The God in whom Rachel believes, if she believes at all, is not a God consistent with the principles of love, sacrifice, and service laid down in Scripture. He is a "brutal joker" (42) who causes humans to make fools of themselves for His amusement. Sandra Djwa calls Him "a cruel god who sports with human misery."[46] Rachel does not see God as a Being worthy of reverence. Although she sometimes hopes against hope that He may be able to help her, Rachel dare not ascribe too much power to the easily-offended God of retribution in whom she has been taught to believe. Such power would mean that, in addition to His little jests, He could fill her life with terror. Thus, in her conversations with God, Rachel tends to bring Him to a

[46]Djwa 44.

human level. For example, when she says, "...the last kind of Creator I could imagine would be a human-type Being who could be reached by tears or bribed with words" (95), she is really equating Divine mercy with weakness. The God of love pictured in Scripture responds to His children's pleas as an act of concern and care, not because He has been manipulated by them into doing so. Rachel, however, fails to understand this distinction. She sees God not as a Being worthy of worship and praise, but as Someone on her own level at whom she can rant and rage, someone who can be understood completely in human terms. Rachel, however, has based her concept of this God merely on what she has been told and on what she has seen in the lives of the so-called Christians around her. She has never actually had a personal experience with Him.

The contact that Rachel believes she has had with God, when she has allowed herself to accept the existence of such a Being, is based entirely on her own preconceptions about Him. Because she thinks of God as cruel and unfair, Rachel supposes that every negative circumstance in her life is part of "a jest of God" directed toward her. After she and Nick make love in his parents' home and she hurries away because Jago has arrived, Rachel talks about her experience to the God who, she believes, has caused the evening to end in such an embarrassing and unsatisfactory way: "All right, God - go ahead and laugh, and I'll laugh with you, but not

quite yet for a while" (115).

Rachel's perception of every unfortunate thing that happens to her as "a personal gesture"[47] by the Deity is one way of dealing with a problem frequently raised in discussions of God and His ways: How does one reconcile the existence of evil and chaos with the concept of a God who is, supposedly, in control of the universe? Rachel's explanation is, however, a very simplistic one. In blaming God in His cruelty for everything that goes wrong, she fails to take any responsibility for her own actions or to take into account the fact that she may have brought trouble on herself as a result of her own wrong choices and perceptions. She also fails to realize that, because she is living in a fallen world, there will be twists and turns of circumstance that need not always be credited to the Creator. These are referred to by Laurence when she speaks of "all the irrelevancy and paradoxical quality of life itself."[48] Sandra Djwa writes, "The laughter of God would seem to be related to the irony of human existence: man, from his restricted vantage point, can almost never fully understand his own condition."[49] Before she can begin to know who God really is and what He is like, Rachel must, as Calla does, look

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[47]Bowering 49.

[48]Clara Thomas, introduction, Margaret Laurence, by Clara Thomas, Canadian Writers 3 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969) 10.

[49]Djwa 45.

beyond the preconceived ideas she has been handed and the views she has formed as a result of these ideas. She must approach God personally and honestly and allow Him to teach her the truth about Himself.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, what is perhaps Rachel's most honest and personal cry to God is born out of desperation. Rachel believes herself to be pregnant, and yet, whether from some hidden religious belief, from fear, or from a love of life she did not know she possessed, she has found it impossible to carry out her attempt at suicide. Her prayer is a moving recognition that, whoever God may be, she needs His help, but even as she prays, Rachel's struggle with God continues. She tells readers, "I don't know why I should be doing this. It is both ludicrous and senseless. I do not know what to say, or to whom. Yet I am on my knees" (171). Rachel seeks to deny that she has actually come to the point of reaching out to God: "I am not praying - if that is what I am doing - out of belief. Only out of need. Not faith, or belief, or the feeling of deserving anything. None of that seems to be so" (171).

Then, from beyond the logic and the desire to make a good appearance and not be thought a fool, even by God, comes a cry from Rachel's heart:

> <u>Help me</u>.
> Help - if You will - me. Whoever that may be. And whoever You are, or where. I am not clever. I am not as clever as I hiddenly thought I was. And I am not as stupid as I dreaded I might be. Were my apologies all a kind of mon-

> strous self-pity? How many sores did I refuse to let heal? (171)

Rachel still questions whether it could be God's will to help her, but the very question contains the faint hope that perhaps He will come to her aid. There is a new humility here as Rachel explores the possibility that she herself may have been responsible for many of the situations in her life that she had formerly blamed on God. She admits the possibility that her apologies have concealed the blinding and destructive force of self-pity, a force that has shaped her life.

In this prayer, Rachel is finally able, at least with God, to abandon her facades. She appears to exercise complete honesty in her evaluation of their relationship:

> We seem to have fought for a long time, I and You.
>
> The ones who do not have anyone else, turn to You - don't you think I know? All the nuts and oddballs turn to You. Last resort. Don't you think I know?
>
> My God, I know how suspect You are. I know how suspect I am. (171)

Rachel's reference to her struggle with God may once again remind readers familiar with Old Testament Scripture of the Jacob of Genesis 32 who wrestled the whole night with God in human form. Like Jacob, Rachel must, it seems, reach the point of defeat before she can begin to experience the blessing.

Throughout this one-sided conversation, Rachel continues to voice her objections to a belief and a faith in God,

and yet, because the conversation continues, one must conclude that she does not discard the idea of a Higher Presence completely. Rachel's use of "I and You," rather than the more common "You and I," may be an indication that she still sees the God in whom she is attempting to believe as a creation of her imagination. Thus, she is the one of greater importance and substance. A few lines later, however, Rachel says, "My God." This may reflect the fact that she has acknowledged that this Being to whom she is speaking has some kind of personal relationship to her.

Rachel tells God,

> If you have spoken, I am not aware of having heard. If You have a voice, it is not comprehensible to me. No omens. No burning bush, no pillar of sand by day or pillar of flame by night. (171)

The means of communication Rachel mentions are from the Old Testament stories she has been taught all her life. Rachel seems unaware that since the coming of the Holy Spirit, an event described in Chapter Two of the New Testament book of Acts, it is no longer necessary that God appear in spectacular burning bushes and pillars of fire. The Holy Spirit, according to conventional Christian belief, now lives in every believer, and communication between human beings and their God is on a more personal basis.

Before her prayer ends, it is apparent that Rachel has begun to hear God's voice, or in other words, to experience His direction in her life. The desperate Rachel who knelt

and cried out to God for help becomes the assured Rachel who knows what course of action she will take. She ends her prayer, "I know what I am going to do....Look - it's my child, mine. And so I will have it. I will have it because I want it and because I cannot do anything else" (171). Rachel will never have to bear the child, but at least she has overcome the paralysis of fear that has kept her from even obtaining a medical diagnosis of her condition.

Edward McCourt has called Rachel's suspected pregnancy followed by the discovery of a tumour "one of the poorer jokes of God."[50] This assessment is, however, open to question in light of Rachel's development as a result of this "joke." It is necessary, apparently, for God to allow Rachel to go through an experience of pain and humiliation so that she can learn the lessons that must become part of her thinking if she is to survive.[51] Robert Chambers

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[50]Edward McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970) 113.

[51]The question about whether God actually causes suffering in order to effect His purposes in human lives or whether, as I have asserted here, He simply allows his creation to experience the suffering imposed by other forces has long caused debate in Christian circles. Those who believe God causes suffering may cite biblical passages similar to Isaiah 45:5-7 in which the prophet delivers the words God has for Cyrus, King of Persia:

"'I am the LORD, and there is no other;
There is no God besides Me.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me,
That they may know from the rising of the
sun to its setting
That there is none besides Me.
I am the LORD, and there is no other;
I form the light and create darkness,

I make peace and create calamity;
I, the LORD, do all these things.'"

Commentators like Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., however, explain such a passage in the following way:

> The text in question refers to physical evil. ...the text contrasts prosperity and adversity. Thus the good is physical goodness and happiness while the adversity, or so-called evil, is physical distress, misfortune and natural evil such as the results of storms or other natural calamities.
>
> Even though much of the physical evil often comes through the hands of wicked men and women, ultimately God permits it. Thus, according to the Hebrew way of speaking, which ignores secondary causation in a way Western thought would never do, whatever God permits must be directly attributed to him [sic], often without noting that secondary and sinful parties were the immediate causes of the physical disaster....Any disaster must fall within the sovereign will of God, even though God is not the sponsor or author of that evil....It would be just plain contrary to his [sic] whole nature and being as consistently revealed in Scripture. (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Hard Sayings of the Old Testament [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988] 195-96.)

There are those who insist that the book of Job contains positive proof that God is not a direct agent of human pain because it is Satan who brings on Job's afflictions. God merely gives Satan permission to do this:

> So Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life.
> "But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his [Job's] bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!"
> So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life." (Job 2:4-6)

Those who believe God causes pain might argue, however, that it is impossible to absolve someone of responsibility for an action if that person has given permission for the event to happen. It is important to remember that if one accepts the Calvinist belief in the ultimate supremacy of God, one also accepts the right of God to deal with His creation in any way in which He sees fit, no matter how irrational and mysterious that way may seem to human beings. My use of the word "allow" with reference to God's dealings with Rachel is a reflection of my personal beliefs with respect to the issue I have discussed here.

writes, "Faced by those moments in life when earthly solutions seem either inadequate or impossible...the women of Margaret Laurence often drift skywards, seeking something way out there."[52]

A number of critics have stated that there is no answer to the prayer for help that Rachel prays on the night of her suicide attempt. There is another view of the situation, however. Rachel has pleaded for help because she thinks she is carrying a child of whom she has said, "It can't be borne. Not by me. What am I going to do? It does not matter at all what I feel, or what the truth is. The only fact is that it cannot be allowed to be" (160). Throughout the novel, readers have watched Rachel vacillate in her decisions. It is true that her natural maternal feelings come to the surface at times, and she believes then that she will be able to give birth and face the reactions of her mother and her acquaintances. At least as often, though, her anguish over her circumstances surfaces in thoughts like those just quoted. Rachel is clearly of two minds about the child she supposes is coming, and her prayer, following as it does her attempt at suicide, seems to be a plea to have the situation in which she finds herself rectified. Even when, at the end of her prayer, Rachel concludes that she can and will have the child, her feelings about giving birth are still ambiguous. Her statement, "I will have it because

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[52]Chambers 19.

I want it and because I cannot do anything else" (171), indicates that she feels her decision has, at least to some extent, been forced upon her. Readers can perhaps see the actual outcome of Rachel's "pregnancy" as a solution that only God could provide.

Noting Rachel's initial devastation at the news of the tumour, readers may be tempted to agree with her that she is dealing with a malicious God who plays jokes in the lives of His children. Viewed objectively, however, the negation of the pregnancy is the only viable answer to Rachel's problem. It is only the idea of motherhood that Rachel loves. She is no more prepared for handling the physical and emotional realities of birth and parenting than is middle-class Manawaka for handling the realities of death. Thus, the fact that she is not pregnant may well be seen as a reprieve given by God to Rachel in answer to her prayer, a sign of the mercy of the God on whom Rachel has called. The tumour is, after all, benign.

As an epigraph for A Jest of God Laurence has used a quotation from Carl Sandburg's Losers:

> If I should pass the tomb of Jonah
> I would stop there and sit for awhile;
> Because I was swallowed one time deep in the dark
> And came out alive after all.

When Rachel's experience is viewed as part of God's plan for bringing about her deliverance from the various forces that have imprisoned her, the meaning of the epigraph becomes clear. Anyone familiar with the story of Jonah in the Old

Testament knows that God did not have a fish swallow Jonah merely so that He could be amused. Jonah was running away from God's command to take His message to Nineveh and thus prevent its destruction. Causing Jonah to be swallowed by the fish was, in a sense, God's way of getting his attention and insuring that Jonah would listen to God and carry out His plan.

In A Jest of God, Rachel has been avoiding her responsibilities and trying to escape the Creator's plan that she live her life instead of hiding from it. The time of trouble that she goes through draws her attention to God and to a new way of hearing His voice. Rachel learns that those who will listen to God's message and learn the meaning of the circumstances in which He has placed them "come out alive after all" to lead a richer life than they could have led before their time "deep in the dark." Watching the changes that are beginning in Rachel, one can perhaps believe that if God has indeed been responsible for what has happened to her, He should be characterized not as a cruel jester, but rather as a firm teacher. There is no question that Rachel's experience has been a harrowing one, but it has been a healing one as well.

One of the first lessons Rachel learns is that it is possible to be a fool and still survive. The fear of appearing foolish that bound Rachel constantly could only be allayed by allowing her to become a fool so that she could

understand that it is not the devastating blow she had thought it would be. Calla is able to understand the truth of Paul's statement about the necessity of becoming a fool before one can be truly wise merely from her reading of Scripture, but Calla has never been afraid of being thought foolish, at least not until the night she goes to the Tabernacle with Rachel. Calla has never bothered to make herself look "usual" (3) and has spoken about her religious beliefs "in a clarion voice" (26), even in the presence of those, like Mrs. Cameron, who feel the Tabernacle is "weird in the extreme" (26). Therefore, it is not hard for her to grasp the import of the apostle's words.

Rachel, however, can only learn Paul's meaning through personal experience. She has been afraid of seeming foolish for so long that only the experience of actually becoming a fool will prove to her that "the wisdom of the world," another name for the system of thought that governs many of the residents of Manawaka, is "foolishness with God" (1 Cor. 3:19). Such wisdom has little to do with the real truth of Christianity. After her visit to Doctor Raven, Rachel thinks,

> All that. And this at the end of it. I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque lightheadedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one. (181)

Rachel has begun to put aside the semblance of truth on which she has been raised and to learn the greater truth and

value system of God. She now knows that there may well be a higher concept of what constitutes foolishness and that by this standard, she may not be judged a fool at all. Later in the novel, Rachel is able to say, "What is so terrible about fools? I should be honoured to be of that company" (198).

Rachel has realized more fully the truth she recognized in part the night she tried to commit suicide. Life is more valuable than death, long-standing Manawakan images of "the golden city" notwithstanding, and life is also more desirable than illusion. As a result of her operation during which she faced death and came through it to life, Rachel abandons, however involuntarily, her ability to retreat into dreams. In her last conversation with an imaginary Nick she says, "You weren't there, after that....A gate closed, quite quietly, and when I tried to open it again, it wouldn't. There wasn't any way around it" (183). She still has some hope of marriage, and while on the bus to Vancouver she thinks, "Maybe I will marry a middle-aged widower, or a longshoreman, or a cattle-hoof-trimmer, or a barrister or a thief" (201). Rachel's list of prospective husbands bears a resemblance to the childish rhyme that is supposed to help young girls determine the occupation of their future husbands: "Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief." Consequently, one might conclude that Rachel is still clinging to her fantasies. The pos-

sible choices with which Rachel peoples her version of the chant are, however, a long way from the shadow prince who once filled her dreams and may indicate that she is at least beginning to come to terms with the reality of her situation.

With Rachel's acceptance of life comes an acceptance of life's reversals, the aging process, and death not as embarrassing and cruel jokes, but as parts of the life cycle. She once cringed at the aged Tom Gillanders' attempt to sing in church and said of the old men sitting outside the Victoria Hotel,

> Perhaps if my father were alive, he'd be there with them. He'd be about that age by now, I guess. I hate to think of him like that, crinkled face not properly shaven, an adam's apple moving up and down in a scrawny throat. I'm not sorry he didn't live, if that is the measure of it. (61)

Now, having gained new insights into the nature of life and its inevitable processes, Rachel expresses a desire to be forgiven for her thoughts by those who were once the objects of her scorn. She thinks, "If I went in there now, unbidden, young to them [the old men in the hotel], strange in my white raincoat, and said Forgive me, they would think I had lost my mind" (162-63).

An acceptance of the aging process as simply part of the life cycle should culminate, logically, in the acceptance of death as well, and this is what happens in Rachel's case as is illustrated by her changing attitude toward her mother. Earlier in the novel, Rachel said of Mrs. Cameron,

"No one could say mortality had very noticeably laid claws on her, not yet" (62). Observing Rachel's constant concern about her mother's health, readers may view this statement as one more instance of Rachel's retreat into illusion. Following her operation, however, Rachel admits to herself for the first time that her mother is old. She sees "the ashes of her face, the ashes of her hair" (186) and realizes that the human cycle must run its course and end in death, even for Mrs. Cameron. Rachel tells readers, "That was the night I quit sending out my swaddled embryo wishes for nothing to happen. No use asking the impossible, even of God" (186). Rachel has, through her experience, learned the futility of her attempts to keep her mother safe, and as a result of her new awareness she says,

> I really wonder now why I have been so ruthlessly careful of her, as though to preserve her throughout eternity, a dried flower under glass. It isn't up to me. It never was. I can take care, but only some. I'm not responsible for keeping her alive. (195)

Rachel accepts death as one of the mysterious parts of life that are ordered by a Higher Power, and in this realization finds "some enormous relief" (195). This new truth frees Rachel from the false guilt caused by her fear of possibly hastening her mother's death by some chance word or action. She accepts "some" responsibility for her mother's care, but she at last begins to understand that she, like Nick, is "not God" (148) and is not required to bear the responsibility required by this role.

In the final pages of the novel, Rachel reveals a still limited but growing understanding of the human condition, indicating that she is moving away from her focus on herself. For example, instead of merely feeling self-pity over her childless state, she can feel a new sympathy for the mothers who will never hold onto the children they have borne. It is significant that as the novel closes, Rachel does not speak of her own fate, but rather, her prayer is for all humanity and, finally, for God: "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God" (202). She has realized the genuine need for mercy and compassion in the world and that even God is truly to be pitied for He is subject to the misconceptions, judgements, prejudices, and often the outright denials of each person who does not yet understand who God is and what His involvement in the human world entails. God, along with many of His people, has become entrapped in the stereotypical and restrictive concepts that limit His power in the lives of those who hold such ideas.

Rachel's sympathy and concern are also expressed in her various personal relationships. She begins to replace her intense focusing on herself with a new interest in those around her. She starts to suspect, for instance, that rather than wanting to frighten her, Willard Siddley may actually have been asking for "condolence." She wonders

> if he's asked for it before, and if at times he's asked for various other things I never suspected,

> admiration or reassurance or whatever it was he didn't own in sufficient quantity. (157)

When Rachel compliments Willard, telling him that he looks "'very fit'" (158), she comments, "He preens with a gratitude so visible that I'm ashamed - of the trick's ease, but also that I never did it sooner, if it could ease him" (158). Her words indicate that she feels a new kindness toward Willard as well as concern for his well-being.

New gentleness and candour are evident in Rachel's relationship with Calla. When the two meet just before Rachel leaves town, Rachel is finally able to speak openly about the relationship Calla wanted between them: "Now, at last, it had to be expressed and offered some acknowledgement, because the truth is that she loves me" (198). When Calla first expressed her feelings of love toward Rachel, Rachel's reaction was to "feel violated, unclean, as though I would strike her dead if I had the means" (38). Now, Rachel is able to face the fact that Calla's love for her is real, even if it has not been offered in a form she can accept. One senses true sympathy for Calla, the rejected lover, when Rachel says, "'I'm sorry things weren't different for you. I mean, that I wasn't different'" (198). This same understanding of Calla is evident when Calla expresses sympathy that "things weren't different" (197) for Rachel, thus forcing Rachel "back into the total pain" (197). Rachel asks herself, "Why couldn't she have kept quiet about it?" Then the new Rachel adds, "But I see she couldn't, not

now, this once" (197-98).

In her conversation with God following her last date with Nick, Rachel said, "My trouble, perhaps, is that I have expected justice. Without being able to give it" (151). Now, Rachel attempts to give others the justice she once denied them. In the process of trying to understand her mother more fully, Rachel says, "She's not trying wilfully not to see, as I once imagined" (193). When she talks to Mrs. Cameron about the necessity of moving away from Manawaka, Rachel is still aware of her mother's dramatization of the situation, but she thinks, "I feel like hell, also, at her hurt, the unfeigned part that doesn't, to her knowledge, ever show" (194). Rachel tells readers, "I have prepared some words for this, but now I am afraid to use them....Afraid...of the apparent callousness her ears will hear and mine can't bear to listen to or admit" (194). Previously, Rachel's fear of confronting her mother had been largely based on a selfish anxiety about the guilt that she would feel should her mother suffer a heart attack as a result of the confrontation. Now, although that anxiety may still be present, Rachel is also thinking of her mother's feelings. Having presented Mrs. Cameron with the idea that it is God who will make the final decision about whether she will live or die, Rachel makes an honest apology: "'I'm sorry.' And I am. Because I didn't know, before, how frightened she is" (196). For years, Rachel has been saying

she is sorry, even when the situation is not really her fault, but this apology is born of real concern for her mother and an understanding of the fear Mrs. Cameron has of dying. Rachel's designation of her mother as "my elderly child" (201) is a sign that Rachel has accepted her new role with its responsibilities, and it is also a mark of the tenderness that she now feels for her parent.

With her new sense of compassion, Rachel is beginning to put into practice the words of Jesus: "'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another'" (John 13:34). In 1 Corinthians 13:13 Paul writes, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." As one nears the conclusion of A Jest of God, it seems apparent that Laurence is in agreement with the apostle's statement for she seems to be saying not that love will solve all of Rachel's problems, but that love will at least help Rachel to break down the barriers that deceit and a sense of false values have raised between her and her fellow human beings.

Rachel proves that in her relationships with others she is also developing the ability to forgive, an ability so important that, according to Jesus, God's forgiveness is conditional upon its practice in the human realm.[53] The

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[53]See Matthew 6:14-15:
"'For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

clearest indication that Rachel is learning forgiveness comes in her reflections on Nick and his treatment of her. After Mrs. Kazlik tells her that Nick is not married, Rachel's first reaction is self-pity and anger: "I wonder why he lied to me....How he must have laughed at how easy it was, at how easy I was, both to pick up and to put down again. God damn him, now and for ever" (189). As Rachel continues to think about the situation, however, she begins to realize that, like almost everything in this novel, it may not be so clear-cut as she has believed. She reviews her last encounter with Nick in her mind:

> Yet - did he lie, though? He showed me the photograph of a boy, and I said _Yours?_ And he said _Yes_....It was, of course, I see now, Nick himself as a child. Yours? Yes, mine. But he intended me to misunderstand. He must have hoped I would. The intention of the lie was there all right. Unless he was simply trying to change the subject....He'd already done what he could, to warn me. _I'm not God, darling - I can't solve anything_. (189)

Rachel realizes that there are too many variables in the interpretation of this incident with Nick to insure a positive accusation. Thus, she concludes that, no matter what his intention, it is better to forgive Nick and grant him, inasmuch as she is able, absolution for what he has done to her. A kinder, more understanding Rachel says of Nick,

> He had his own demons and webs. Mine brushed across him for an instant, and he saw them and had

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"'But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'"

> to draw away, knowing that what I wanted from him was too much. Was that it? Or was he merely becoming bored?
>
> I don't know whether he meant to lie to me or not. (189-90)

She has learned to extend to Nick the same kind of forgiveness that Calla previously extended to her. Rachel's new ability to forgive reaches its culmination in the final words of the novel. With her call for "God's pity on God" (202), she finally begins to free the Creator from the blame that she had previously attached to Him for every hurtful circumstance.

It is evident that Rachel is beginning to lose the pride that has isolated her and prevented her from enjoying a full relationship with those around her and with God. When Nick talks about his father's wish that he stay in Manawaka, Rachel suggests, "'Well, you might teach here, I suppose'" (142), thus voicing her greatest hope. She thinks to herself,

> What possessed me, to suggest a thing like that? So openly. Haven't I any pride?
>
> No, I have no pride. None left, not now. This realization renders me all at once calm, inexplicably, and almost free. (142)

God is, through her sufferings, teaching Rachel to experience joy, something that has never, as far as readers know, been present in her life. Reflecting on the idea, expressed in both the Old and New Testaments, that there must often be suffering before God can bring joy and renewal, Rachel says, "I do not know how many bones need be

broken before I can walk" (201). She admits with these words that she does not understand God's ways; she must just accept His pronouncements. Here, a shadow of the authoritarian God creeps back into her thinking. But then, words from Scripture begin to come into Rachel's mind: "Make me to hear" (201). Rachel asks herself, "How does it go? What are the words? I can't have forgotten all the words, surely, the words of the songs, the psalms" (201). In trying to remember the words, Rachel also remembers that not all aspects of the Christian religion that she has experienced have been gloomy and fear-inspiring. She was once taught the concept of joy, but she has not remembered it for a long time. The words, however, do come back to her: "Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice" (201; cf. Ps. 51:8). Rachel also remembers the idea that God gives joy even in difficult times when she says, "I may sing aloud, even in the dark" (202), recalling the psalmist's words, "...in the night His song shall be with me -/ A prayer to the God of my life" (Ps. 42:8). With its repression of emotion, the United Church has denied the idea of joy. The Tabernacle, on the other hand, has perverted the concept into an uninhibited, disorderly celebration. Only the Scriptures themselves can give Rachel the information she needs to help her understand the answer to the question she once asked God about her situation: "How dare you?" (151). As she remembers the

words of the psalm, Rachel, it seems, may be beginning to understand that what she would once have termed the act of a "brutal joker" (42) also bears aspects of the life-giving act of a merciful Creator.

As a result of her difficulties, Rachel has found within herself a sustaining core of strength and integrity she did not know she possessed. Margaret Laurence has written that the theme that runs through this novel is

> The theme of survival - survival not just in the physical sense, but the survival of some human dignity and in the end the survival of some human warmth and ability to reach out and touch others -[54]

It seems that, according to Laurence, Rachel's hope and the possibility of her deliverance lie in her acceptance of the genuine Christian values that form the fabric of the novel. Laurence uses a technique similar to that employed by Sinclair Ross in As For Me and My House when she describes a town where life is lived as if Christ and the Scriptural concepts of mercy, compassion, love, and joy do not exist. Such a description forces readers to consider what is missing from Manawaka and, hence, to realize the worth of those absent qualities.

In addition to finding and adopting new values, Rachel's search also involves an attempt to arrive at a new understanding of God. In many ways, the God whom Rachel comes to acknowledge is not the God of her ancestors.

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[54]Margaret Laurence, "Sources," Mosaic 111 (1970): 84.

Still, when she recalls the words of a psalm and when she speaks of God to her mother in the words of a "nineteenth-century cliché" (194), it is evident that she has not abandoned all of the ideas she has been taught. The important thing is that she has learned to weigh her spiritual inheritance carefully and to seek out those things of true value that it contains.

Rachel is learning that God, whoever He may be, can reveal Himself differently as the situation and time demand. She discovers that God is not bound by any one person's view of Him. Each individual's experience of God must be personal, and the Deity must be allowed to speak to each human being in a way he or she can understand:

> For modern man, the old gods of the fathers are dead, or, if they still exist, they no longer manifest themselves in the old ways and must be re-defined by each person according to his own experience as Rachel does....[55]

The language of technology used by Rachel in the prayer she prays following her operation indicates that any God she recognizes must be relevant to her twentieth-century world:

> Nothing must disturb me....This was all I prayed, to no one or to whoever might be listening, prayed unprayerfully, not with any violence of demand or any valiance of hope, but only sending the words out, in case. Do you read me? This message is being sent out to the cosmos, or into the same, by an amateur transmitter who wishes for the moment to sign off. Don't let anything happen. (185)

The ending of Rachel's spiritual search, at least as

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[55]Djwa 49.

far as this novel is concerned, is ambiguous:

> ...at the conclusion of <u>A Jest of God</u>, we are left with the ironic awareness that, as Rachel says "anything may happen." There is, of course, a new dispensation, but nobody's salvation...is ever final and we as readers are left to draw our own conclusions.[56]

Rachel is still unwilling, or unable, to acknowledge the validity of traditional prayer. Thus, she prays "unprayerfully," but she is now sending out her message "in case." Her comments and thoughts about God suggest, however, that there are still many layers of possible meaning to be sifted through before she can finally arrive at the truth about what she believes. When Mrs. Cameron asks who could know "what's what" about her health if Dr. Raven doesn't, Rachel answers, "God, for all I know" (195). Such a tentative acknowledgement that there may be a God indicates that Rachel's thinking in this regard has not yet reached the level at which it could be called faith, but Rachel is at least admitting that she is considering the possibility that God exists. She has battled with God, or her idea of God, for so long that she cannot decide whether her limited acknowledgement of Him is "some partial triumph" or "only the last defeat" (195).

Rachel continues to question not only God's existence, but also the relationship between the God of mercy of whom she has had a glimpse and the cruel, jesting God at whom she

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[56]Djwa 49.

has railed. She realizes that through her pain, new possibilities have been opened up for her, but when she says, "I do not know how many bones need be broken before I can walk," she adds, "And I do not know, either, how many need not have been broken at all" (201). Rachel may have recognized that her concept of a brutal God is an exaggeration, but she has also learned that the idea of a God who takes away all unpleasantness at the request of His children is as fanciful as is that of attaining "the golden city" without first going through the physical indignities of death.

Although Rachel's understanding of God and faith may not be conventional, it is clear that the Judeo-Christian tradition has been of concern to Margaret Laurence in writing this novel. There are the detailed portraits of the two churches as well as Rachel's conversations with God. There are also the various Biblical quotations and allusions, some of them fairly obscure, and the identification, commented on by various critics, of characters with their Scriptural counterparts.[57] Denyse Forman and Uma

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[57]Numerous critics have referred to the extensive use made by Laurence of Scriptural parallels. Barbara Hehner observes,

> In A Jest of God Laurence developed the parallels between Nick Kazlik and the biblical Jacob, not only in his relationship to Rachel (who, like her biblical namesake, demands of him, "Give me my children"), but also in his relationship to his twin brother Steve, the brother who (like Esau), was disinherited. (Barbara Hehner, "River of Now and Then: Margaret Laurence's Narratives," Canadian Literature 74 [1977]: 54.)

Kenneth Hughes draws the parallel between Nick and Jacob and

Parameswaran note that

> most of the characters in [Laurence's] novels are deeply influenced by their early religious training and the words of psalms and hymns, though long unheard, rise to the surface of their consciousness to give them a much needed sense of perspective.[58]

Laurence's heavy reliance on the Scriptures for material may cause readers to go to the Bible to examine, as Calla does, the subject for themselves. Calla points out that her only access to truth has been the Bible. Thus, Laurence says as plainly as possible that a search for spiritual truth must involve a first-hand examination of the written word of God.

Laurence's use of Scriptural references is particularly evident in her presentation of the relationship between Rachel and Nick. Thinking of her phone call to Nick and the curt, businesslike tone she believes she has detected in his

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also identifies Nick with Cain of the Genesis story of Cain and Abel and with the Prodigal Son of the parable told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-24 (Hughes 44). Sandra Djwa identifies Nick with Jacob and with the Israelites, and she makes the common comparison between Rachel and the Rachel of Genesis, but she also sees Rachel as "Jerusalem the bride" (Djwa 48). John Lennox says of the Bible stories,

> They are the stories of another ancient, wandering people seeking deliverance in a new land....There is a way in which Laurence works out from her particular place and its times to touch what they, and we, represent universally. (John Watt Lennox, "Manawaka and Deptford: Place and Voice," Journal of Canadian Studies 13.3 [1978]: 29.)

Given Laurence's extensive use of Scriptural allusion, it is possible that she may be drawing a parallel between Rachel's desperate search for a God and the struggle of the Israelites to come into a covenant relationship with their Lord.

[58]Forman and Parameswaran 238.

voice, Rachel recalls a passage from the Song of Songs: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awaken love, until it please" (131-32; cf. Song Sol. 2:7; 3:5).[59] Speaking of his situation with his family, Nick tells Rachel, "'I have forsaken my house - I have left mine heritage - mine heritage is unto me as a lion in the forest - it crieth out against me - therefore have I hated it'" (110; cf. Jer. 12:7, 8). When Rachel tentatively mentions the subject of children to Nick, she thinks that she could have cried, "'Give me my children,'" thus echoing the Rachel of Genesis when she told Jacob, "'Give me children, or else I die!'" (Gen. 30:1). It should be noted that the majority of Scriptural allusions made by Nick and Rachel are from the Old Testament. Both of these characters are more familiar with God's former dealings with His people than with the current workings of the Creator in their world. They need to experience personally the Scriptural covenant of grace and love if fulfillment is to take place in their lives.

As was the case in As For Me and My House, it may be said that it is the coming of this covenant that accounts for the new openness and the spirit of forgiveness and mercy that are evident in the concluding chapters of this novel:

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[59]This quotation from the Song of Songs is ironic in view of the fact that Rachel is coming to see Nick as her god. According to one school of theological thought, the Song speaks of Christ and the Church's role as His bride.

> This perception of the spirit which can sometimes inform the flesh is the true covenant of grace promised by God to the weeping Rachel of Jeremiah ....Through the grappling with the false forms of religion, the individual has the possibility of winning through to the true spirit which can inform the flesh which the now lifeless convention has denied....the true covenant of the spirit is that dispensation which allows her [Rachel] to give and take affection in the sometimes mundane but always real present....[60]

David Blewett has observed that "Air, in the form of wind and voices, is the dominant element in A Jest of God....[61] Riding on the bus to Vancouver, Rachel says, "I will be light and straight as any feather. The wind will bear me, and I will drift and settle, and drift and settle" (201). Given the importance of both the wind and Christianity in this novel and also the similarities between A Jest of God and As For Me and My House, it seems conceivable that the wind to which Rachel commits herself at the conclusion of the book is a symbol of the Holy Spirit who has brought the dispensation of grace into her life. Just as the wind in As For Me and My House blew down the false fronts, so the wind of the Spirit has, in this text, blown away the spider webs of deceit and false belief that have separated Rachel from the truth for so long.

In A Jest of God, Laurence seems to point the way to at least the beginning of a solution for "the human dilem-

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[60]Djwa 43-44, 50.

[61]Blewett 36.

ma."[62] Throughout this novel, she urges that "the Word [be made] flesh" (John 1:14) in a very practical way through the adoption of the principles of love and service advocated in the Gospels. Faith may, as in Rachel's case, begin to grow as these principles are incorporated into one's life, but it is not conventional faith in God that Laurence deems necessary. She has stated, "'My sense of religion has been in doubt for years, but I have the sense that my belief in the Holy Spirit gives us the responsibility to care for our fellow man.'"[63] Robert Chambers writes,

> At the outset, notice that for Laurence the secular church is never a satisfactory recourse. Laurence is apparently alienated from the wild irrationality and uncontrolled emotional indulgence of fundamentalism....But the available alternatives are just as appalling....Whatever else true religion may be for Laurence, it is not a mindlessly ordered respectability.[64]

If one would find the value in Christianity, Margaret Laurence seems to be telling her readers, it is necessary to scrape away its veneer and look to its core. It is the important truth of Scripture, not the man-made interpretations imposed upon God and His word, that upholds and sustains Rachel in her crisis and promises to give new meaning to her life. Once truth has been discovered, however, it must, Laurence implies, be translated into practical expres-

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[62]Read 14.

[63]Matt Cohen, "Rebel Angel," Books in Canada 13 (Feb. 1984): 5.

[64]Chambers 19.

sions of love and assistance to one's fellow human beings. Only then will that truth begin to make humankind free.

CHAPTER 3

"Concerning All That Is Done Under Heaven": Who Has Seen the Wind

Like As For Me and My House, Who Has Seen the Wind is set on the prairies during the Great Depression. In this text the questions about the Christian religion and the nature of God are presented, at least partially, through the person of Brian O'Connal, W. O. Mitchell's child protagonist. Because Brian is a child, the questions he asks are, on one level, more simplistic than those examined in As For Me and My House and A Jest of God. On another level, however, they are profound and all-encompassing. At the age of eight, Brian thinks, "It wouldn't be so bad...if a person knew, or even knew what it was that he wanted to know."[1] In his preface to the novel, W. O. Mitchell states,

> In this story I have tried to present sympathetically the struggle of a boy to understand what still defeats mature and learned men - the ultimate meaning of the cycle of life.[2]

Ken Mitchell says, "What Brian is faced with learning is an

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[1]W. O. Mitchell, Who Has Seen the Wind (1947; Toronto: Macmillan, 1972) 198. All references to Who Has Seen the Wind are to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

[2]W. O. Mitchell, preface, Who Has Seen the Wind, by W. O. Mitchell (1947; Toronto: Macmillan, 1972) n.p.

understanding of the universe, the meaning and existence of God,"[3] and these are also the subjects that W. O. Mitchell asks his readers to consider in Who Has Seen the Wind.

In an interview that appeared in Quill & Quire, W. O. Mitchell stated unequivocally his opinion of organized churches and their practices:

> I am an extremely religious man....I'm not at all dogmatically or ritualistically religious. I got cheesed off with Sunday school by the time I reached 11 or 12. I could not accept the inadequate rituals. They were not graceful to me.[4]

Mitchell's disenchantment with traditional Christianity is evident in many of the characters he creates. For example, Reverend Hislop, the Presbyterian minister, and his wife are examples of Christians who have lost their enthusiasm for their faith. Early in the novel the four-year-old Brian decides to visit Knox Presbyterian Church in an effort to find some answers to his many questions about God, but neither Mr. Hislop nor his wife do much to clarify the boy's conceptions of the Deity. Mrs. Hislop actually seems somewhat intimidated by Brian's direct assertion that he is going to see God. His question about the meaning of the term "spirit" and his interest in whether or not God smells

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[3]Ken Mitchell, "The Universality of W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind," Lakehead University Review 4.1 (1971): 34.

[4]W. O. Mitchell, "W. O. Mitchell: 'I'm Not Dogmatically or Ritualistically Religious...but I Think I'm an Honourable Man,'" with Alan Twigg, Quill & Quire 50 (Oct. 1984): 6.

disconcert her. She suggests, "with relief loosening her words" (9), that Brian talk to her husband and explains that "'It's - it's his [Reverend Hislop's] job to know God'" (9), thus avoiding the difficult task of explanation and relegating all responsibility for forming a meaningful relationship with God to a member of the clergy. The minister's theology, however, does little to enlighten the child and is, in fact, questionable. To Brian's question about whether God is busy, Reverend Hislop replies kindly, but somewhat perfunctorily, "'Yes. He's busy'" (23). When explaining about angels, Hislop tells Brian, "'When a little boy dies, he becomes a boy angel'" (24), a statement nowhere substantiated in Scripture.

Brian's eager desire to see God is quenched to some extent by the Hislops, who have other, more worldly and practical matters with which to deal. In answer to Brian's question, "'If your husband works for God, then he could take me in His house for a while, couldn't he?'" (10), Mrs. Hislop responds, "'Perhaps he could. Tomorrow.'" To Brian's anxious "'Not now?'" she answers, "'Tomorrow - in the morning - after breakfast'" (10). When Brian does reappear at the Hislops' house the next morning and tells the minister, "'I'm visiting God today'" (22), Mr. Hislop, although agreeable, puts off the visit for the moment, saying, "'I'm at breakfast right now, but I think we could make it after another piece of toast'" (22). Mitchell would

have his readers understand, it seems, that in the adult world, or at least in the Hislops' world, questions about God and excitement over spiritual matters lose their immediacy and are replaced by other concerns. Mrs. Hislop's rather absentminded attitude about the keys to God's house reinforces the implication that in the Hislop home, God's work is treated rather casually. "'Where are the keys, dear?'" Mr. Hislop asks his wife, and she responds,

> "Hanging behind the front door - or on the hall table....Look in the top drawer of the sewing machine - I can't - they might be on the mantel. I don't remember exactly where I put them after Mrs. Abercrombie borrowed them for Auxiliary." (22)

The Hislops are in marked contrast to Brian, who is so excited about visiting God in "'His house'" (9) that he "could hardly contain himself" (22) while waiting for the keys to be found. As representatives of a mainstream denomination, they embody the lack of spiritual verve that marks the portrayal of organized Christianity in this novel.

In addition, although playing the role of the "good minister,"[5] the enlightened man who tries to break out of traditional bonds of established religion, Reverend Hislop has none of the spiritual valour spoken of in the New Testament by the apostle Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians,

> Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

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[5]W. O. Mitchell, Quill & Quire 6.

> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Eph. 6:10-11)

In an act of rebellion against the closed-minded Christian establishment, Mr. Hislop insists on keeping the name of the outcast Romona on Knox Presbyterian Church's Christmas hamper list. This is in defiance of Mrs. Abercrombie's decree that the red tissue paper with which Romona has covered her window is "An immoral red" (25) and makes public Romona's relationship with the men from the freight trains whose washing and meals she takes care of. Mrs. Abercrombie is a character who corresponds closely to Mrs. Finley of As For Me and My House. Her desire is to mold her church and her community in accordance with what she considers proper Christian standards. Although Hislop does stand up to the woman on this matter and attempts to exercise the Christianity of the Gospels toward Romona, he is not strong enough to withstand the onslaught of criticism and complaint launched against him as a result.

Hislop states that his own faith in God is "solid" (49), but he does like to discuss systems of philosophy and religious thought not commonly explored by conventional members of the clergy, at least those who serve in little towns like the one Mitchell has created. He, however, carries on these discussions only with the school principal, Digby, who has a number of unconventional ideas of his own and never comes to church. When the small-minded tactics of

Mrs. Abercrombie culminate in her letter condemning the C.G.I.T. candlelight service, Hislop feels "a wave of futility pass over him, a despondency deeper than any he had known in his life." He knows that "his faith had been badly shaken, faith in the people he preached to, faith in his work... (49). To combat this crisis of faith, Hislop resolves that he will go and talk to Digby. The Church and the Christian community offer no suitable confidant for a clergyman who is troubled and who does not think as do the conventional Christians of the town.

When Mitchell describes the board of elders of Knox Presbyterian Church as they listen to Hislop read Mrs. Abercrombie's letter of protest about the controversial C.G.I.T. service, it becomes evident that these people would not be capable of grasping the minister's ideas even were he to attempt to share them:

> A stiff and uncomfortable silence had descended on the room as Hislop put down the letter. He looked to his elders questioningly. Judge Mortimer stepped forward silently from the rest, a broad, gray-mustached man with the impressive dignity that came of presiding in court and of being sublimely ignorant. He felt the same as Mrs. Abercrombie about the candlelight service. In turn, the other elders expressed their agreement with the sentiment of the letter; only Mr. Nightingale, who was slightly deaf and had not heard enough of the letter to trust himself in a statement, failed to support Mrs. Abercrombie and the Ladies Auxiliary. (52)

Mr. Hislop, for all his attempts at more liberal thinking, does allow himself to be controlled completely by the tradition-bound elders. Instead of defending his intentions

to Mrs. Abercrombie, he feels he must call a meeting of these men and ask for their opinions. When he does not receive their support, he merely resigns. Reverend Hislop, it seems, has adopted only the meekness taught by Christ without the tempering strength of conviction also taught by Him. Although Mitchell may be trying to illustrate the point that any attempt to practise a vibrant religion will be quelled by the members of Canada's organized churches, his point would have been better made had Mr. Hislop at least made some attempt to explain himself and defend his actions rather than wilting totally when the church members express opposition to his plans.

The description of the Knox Presbyterian elders is only one of several instances in this novel in which Mitchell openly expresses the contempt he feels for the formal Church and its hypocritical adherents. Laurence Ricou speaks of "the balancing objectivity of third-person narration,"[6] but Mitchell is hardly objective in his judgements of the nominal Christians in Who Has Seen the Wind. In addition to his comment that Judge Mortimer is "sublimely ignorant," Mitchell writes that "Mrs. Abercrombie's intolerance was an evil force in the town" (48). He has Hislop wonder, when thinking about Mrs. Abercrombie and her letter, "How could a person be content with the husk, the dry appearance that

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[6]Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1973) 108.

gave shape to a religion?" (49). With his acidic third-person commentary, Mitchell eliminates any chance that readers might fail to grasp the points he is making about organized churches in Canada and the kind of Christianity that is being practised there.

In her campaign to get rid of Reverend Hislop, Mrs. Abercrombie tells Gerald and Maggie O'Connal, "'We need an up-and-coming man in the church'" (45). Ironically, Mr. Powelly, Mr. Hislop's replacement, does not lead the church and its members "up" and forward in the practice of Christianity. Mr. Powelly has never progressed in his beliefs past the idea of a God of vengeance. His faith is, in fact, like that of many of the characters in As For Me and My House and A Jest of God, the antithesis of the Christianity taught by Christ.

After Mr. Powelly has tried, by extending to him the Right Hand of Fellowship, to assimilate the Ben into the rigid church system designed to hold only the traditionally pious, the minister proceeds to emphasize his accomplishment by making the Ben the subject of a number of sermons. He bases these messages on the New Testament parables of "The Lost Sheep," "The...Lost Penny," and "The Prodigal's Return" (129). Such sermons must cause even an unconventional character like the Ben a substantial amount of embarrassment, and readers may feel that Mr. Powelly receives no more than his due when the Ben's still, hidden in the church

basement, explodes, thus destroying Mr. Powelly's self-righteous claim to have added a wandering sinner to the Lord's flock. Following this incident, "The minister was aware of an undying, Old Testament thirst for revenge - a thirst, he revolved [sic] fiercely, which should have its full slaking one day" (130). Mitchell adds that Mr. Powelly "nursed scalding bitterness in his heart" (148) toward the Ben.

As proven by his vendetta against the Ben, forgiveness is not part of Mr. Powelly's credo, and he believes totally in the edict that Yahweh gave Moses: "'...you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe'" (Exod. 21:23-25). Mr. Powelly seems never to have comprehended Christ's words:

> "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt. 6:14-15)

Mr. Powelly is also determined to make the young Ben suffer for his father's deeds. Digby, listening to Mr. Powelly's plea that he retract his payment for the gun and shells stolen by the Young Ben so that the minister can have the youngster sent to reform school, accuses Mr. Powelly of putting into practice the biblical proverb, "'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'" (217, cf. Ezek. 18:2). Mr. Powelly denies this

accusation, but his denial is unconvincing. When Mr. Powelly refuses Digby's invitation, "'I'd welcome any help with the Young Ben that you - [can give]'" (216), he is disregarding the spirit of Christ's words: "'Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven'" (Matt. 18:10). Mr. Powelly hides behind the illusion of morality when he tells Digby,

> "But - that he [the Young Ben] should steal and then get off scot-free....It would be through your - I'm sure it was with the best of intentions - your unthinking kindness. It can't help but create an unfortunate impression among other youngsters who may be so tempted." (218)

Readers weighing Digby's "unthinking kindness" against Mr. Powelly's standards of Presbyterian judgement may well decide, however, that Digby is the real proponent of Christianity in this instance.

Preparing his Sunday message, Mr. Powelly chooses to include the following New Testament Scriptures: "'I am the vine, ye are the branches'" (John 15:5). "'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered...'" (John 15:6). "'This is my commandment, That ye love one another...'" (John 15:12). He muses that "This was one of the vital things of the Gospel" (191). Mr. Powelly's musings are ironic, however, because the minister has no love in his heart and no understanding of "the vital things" about which he preaches. Mr. Powelly's actions are in direct opposition to the words he quotes. The very

Scripture passages he chooses condemn him. Like the minister in Laurence's Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn, Mr. Powelly seems to have only a superficial knowledge of the Bible from which he preaches.

In choosing the topics for his sermons, Mr. Powelly is not even true to his calling. Rather than preaching the Lord's word, he chooses to use his pulpit to promote his own ends. When the Ben is not brought to justice, despite Mr. Powelly's "personal encounters with Jake Harris [the town constable], bidding him do his duty" and his "passionate exhortations to the police department at town council meetings" (148), Mr. Powelly

> delivered pointed sermons from the pulpit, criticizing the garbage department ("Community Cleanliness Next to Community Godliness"), bristling with illustrative reference to the fire department ("Flames of Hell Are Ready for the Unready Fireman"). (148)

Following the Ben's conviction for bootlegging, Mr. Powelly chooses as his Scriptuie:

> "Behold, upon the mountains the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows; for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off." (260-61; cf. Nah. 1:15)

Mr. Powelly wants to be sure his congregation knows where he stands on the issue of the Ben and his still.

Mr. Powelly's concept of vengeance fits in well with the four-year-old Brian's idea of a God whose chief function is to punish his grandmother and Artie. The avenging Jehovah is very much a part of Mr. Powelly's thinking

because he has never "put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). William New supports this idea when he writes,

> Bent Candy in his greed and the Abercrombies and Mr. Powelly in their desire for revenge furnish ready examples of pettiness and petulance despite their adult years. Their world, like the child's world, is built around themselves, and basing their actions on material values, they can neither appreciate breadth of mind nor express valid and deep emotion.[7]

Having failed in his attempt to have Digby change his mind about paying for the things the Young Ben has stolen, Powelly enlists the aid of Mrs. Abercrombie in an attempt to have Digby dismissed from his position as principal. Forgiveness is not part of Mrs. Abercrombie's creed either, and she is ready to assist the minister because "She had never forgiven Digby for telling her that her daughter was lazy" (254).

Mr. Powelly and Mrs. Abercrombie are, in fact, an appropriate pair in many ways, and Mitchell suggests that their alliance may be "like calling to like" (104). D. G. Jones comments that "In their opposition to the Bens and to the school principal...[Mr. Powelly and Mrs. Abercrombie] reveal at length the essential hypocrisy and final sterility of their attitude."[8] For both these characters, holiness is a superficial thing, and the practice of Christianity is

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[7]William H. New, "A Feeling of Completion: Aspects of W. O. Mitchell," Canadian Literature 17 (Summer 1963): 29.

[8]D. G. Jones, Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970) 37.

a sham. Although together they begin "a campaign of Personal Visitation to Bring Souls to the Mercy Seat" (103-04), their spiritually-barren venture is doomed to failure. Milt Palmer gives an example of the campaign's lack of success when he tells Digby, "'Him [Mr. Powelly] an' God didn't do so good'" (138). When the Lord's wrath is suddenly revealed in the form of Saint Sammy's mighty wind, Mr. Powelly and Mrs. Abercrombie are both driven to their knees. This prayer of fear is the only honest prayer these two take part in during the course of the novel. So unused to prayer is Mrs. Abercrombie that she seems completely taken aback by Mr. Powelly's "'Let us pray!'" (271).

Mrs. Abercrombie, like Mrs. Finley in As For Me and My House and Mrs. Cameron in A Jest of God, is representative of an outwardly pious layperson in a mainstream denomination. She is a member of the Ladies' Auxiliary, and she sings in the choir, although, as Brian observes, her mouth as she sings forms a "round little well, ready for her to blow a round holy bubble" (111). A bubble has, of course, no substance, and the fact that Brian imagines Mrs. Abercrombie blowing a bubble as she sings may well be an indication of the vacuousness of the woman's mind with respect to "holy" things.

Mrs. Abercrombie has little connection with the basic values of Christianity. Christ told His followers,

> "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also

> love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Rather than being an agent of love, however, Mrs. Abercrombie, along with her daughter, Mariel, is an agent of prejudice and disharmony. Her letter about the C.G.I.T. candlelight ceremony is indicative of the religious bigotry in the church. Mrs. Abercrombie and her supporters are afraid the service is "an indication that Knox Presbyterian church was turning Roman Catholic" (48). Mrs. Abercrombie has firmly instilled her questionable values in her daughter. Mitchell refers to Mariel as "a full-faced little sadist" (141) and indicates that she is the child mainly responsible for the "periodic ostracism" (141) of the China Kids, an ostracism that culminates in the boycotting of Tang's birthday party. Miss Thompson notes that she sees the "same slightly stunned look of inattention" (159) on Mariel's face that she sees on that of her mother. Neither are aware of the degree of harm they are doing with their prejudices and their hatred based on misinformation. Like Judge Mortimer on the board of elders, they are frightening in their ignorance.

Mrs. Abercrombie is simply oblivious to the plight of others. Her comment of "'Grand day'" (190) shocks Gerald O'Connal, who wonders how she can be unaware of what the hot, dry weather is doing to the farmers' crops. It is not surprising that Mrs. Abercrombie, who understands nothing of

mercy, is unable to quote correctly Shakespeare's famous words on the subject. She explains to the school board that "'The quality of mercy...is not strange'" (283). Warren Tallman says of Mrs. Abercrombie and her supporters, "...the savagery is...there...but it has become socially organized, hence acceptable. Mrs. Abercrombie, the town assassin, is also the town social leader."[9]

Lest one think that Mitchell is merely pointing the finger of religious criticism at Presbyterians and dominating females, Who Has Seen the Wind also contains a portrait of Bent Candy who is "serving his fifteenth year as Baptist deacon" (268). When Sean O'Connal comes to ask Candy to consider taking part in an irrigation project that will, presumably, help all the farmers in the district, he is driven to cursing by Candy's closed-minded, selfish attitude. Candy is quick to order Sean off his land, crying, "'You ain't talkin' that way on my place! Git offa here with yer cursin' an' swearin'!'" (212). Mitchell, however, calls Candy the "profaner of almost a township of flat loam" (211) and seems to be saying that Candy's brand of profanity is more damaging than Sean's. Candy is definitely not his "'brother's keeper'" (Gen. 4:9), and readers may wonder if his tirade against Sean's swearing is not merely an excuse to get Sean, with his conflicting

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[9]Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow: Part One: Four Windows on to Landscapes," Canadian Literature 5 (Summer 1960): 11.

ideas, off Candy's property. Sean seems to have correctly analyzed Candy when he tells him,

> "All ye're int'rested in is the ten bushels to the acre that'll show ye a profit! Profit - profit - an' ye call yerself a religious man. Christian! Oh - I can show ye more religion up a gosh-hawk's - " (212)

Against the dictates of "His Baptist conscience" that tells him "that Clydes were only horses after all" and "The church...could use new pews" (268), Candy lusts after the magnificent Clydes that are almost the only possessions of his poor neighbour, Sammy Belterlaben, who lives in a piano box on Magnus Petersen's south eighty. Candy's lust is in direct violation of the tenth commandment:

> "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that <u>is</u> your neighbor's." (Exod. 20:17)

Mitchell makes it clear that Candy, who drives a tractor, has no real use for Sammy's Clydes. It is pure greed that inspires him to demand them from their owner.

Bent Candy gives the appearance of a man blessed by the Lord for his righteousness and hard work. Mitchell writes that

> Candy had prospered during the dry years, spreading his crops over land wherever discouraged farmers had left; he put in acre after acre of wheat, his overhead was low, he could show a profit on only ten bushels' return to the acre. He had been lucky too; if rain fell, it fell on Candy's land; hail had stripped down both sides and around his crops but never on them. (119)

Candy's prosperity is so great, in fact, that he is known in

the district as "'the Flax King'" (264). Bent Candy is, however, one of the wicked of whom the Psalmist says:

> Behold, these are the ungodly,
> Who are always at ease;
> They increase in riches. (Ps. 73:12)

He also illustrates Christ's words: "'...it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'" (Matt. 19:24). Having noted Candy's lack of concern about his neighbours and also his greed, readers may find it easy to believe Sean's parting words to the man:

> "I'll be seein' you in hell when that time comes...We'll both be there!...Ye will be there, bumpin' an' bouncin' an' jigglin' fer all eternity with a red-hot tractor seat to shrivel yer hide to everlastin'! We'll both be there!" (212)

Although the vengeance of the Lord may seem slow, the Bible predicts that it is being prepared and will, in fact, come at its proper time.[10] As Sammy tells the unrelenting Bent Candy, "'...the Lord hath mighty lightnin''" (266). The writer of Proverbs states, "The wicked are overthrown and are no more, But the house of the righteous will stand" (Prov. 12:7). These words describe the scene following the

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[10]In Deuteronomy 32:35 God declares,

> "Vengeance is Mine, and recompense;
> Their foot shall slip in due time;
> For the day of their calamity is at hand,
> And the things to come hasten upon them."

A corresponding reference from the New Testament is found in Romans 12:19 where Paul writes,

> Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

windstorm that the Lord presumably sends in answer to Sammy's prayer for justice. After the storm, Candy is left staring "at the utter, kindling ruin of what had once been a barn" (272), the barn that was to have housed the horses secured as a result of his greed. The Abercrombies are left to deal with a porch "wrecked by an uprooted popular" (274). Sean's farm, however, is untouched, and Sammy's flimsy piano box home has stood firm and has sheltered both the old man and Brian.

The religious denomination to which she belongs is never specified, but Miss MacDonald, Brian's first teacher, is an example of a person who has adopted a harsh and uncompromising creed for her theology. When she discovers that Brian has told a lie about having washed his hands, Miss MacDonald tells him, "'The Lord punishes little boys who don't wash their hands and then say they did'" (91).

Miss MacDonald has the children in her classroom say the Lord's Prayer every morning, but like the borrowing of "the Gideon Bible...from the Royal Hotel" (259) so that court can be held in the town hall, this act constitutes mere payment of lip service to the principles found in Scripture. Like many of the other characters in this novel, Miss MacDonald knows only a God of vengeance. It is small wonder that in the midst of his punishment, Brian senses the God whom Miss MacDonald serves as "a vague knotting at the back of his head, as though an unseen watcher was looking

on" (92) and surmises that "The Lord's anger must be a fearful thing" (93).

The teacher is one more character in this text who desires to be avenged more than she desires to forgive. She demonstrates the sin of self-righteousness when confronted by Maggie O'Connal. Miss MacDonald feels that Brian must pay for the lie he has told her. When Maggie questions the severity of Brian's punishment, the teacher maintains, "'He had it coming to him....I feel that I was quite right'" (96). She is, like the God in whom she believes, "an efficient [person] who look[s] for results" (92) from the punishments she inflicts. The bitterness at life that Miss MacDonald vents on her children is in direct opposition to the Gospel of love, mercy, and fullness of life taught by Christ.[11]

Miss MacDonald's teaching about God is as false in its own way as are Reverend Hislop's saccharin ideas about little boy angels. Brian has, it is true, sensed the presence of Miss MacDonald's God in his world. This is evident when he encounters the body of a dead gopher on the prairie:

> Prairie's awful, thought Brian, and in his mind there loomed vaguely fearful images of a still and brooding spirit, a quiescent power unsmiling from everlasting to everlasting to which

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[11]It is significant that Miss MacDonald, as Maggie O'Connal points out, has never borne a child. This is a common literary symbol for spiritual and emotional barrenness and lack of fulfillment.

> the coming and passing of the prairie's creatures was but incidental. (128-29)

This description is reminiscent of Mrs. Bentley's encounter with ancient and terrifying forces during her stay at Stanley and Laura's ranch. As Laurence Ricou states, however, "Brian has already sensed God's tender view for himself."[12] To prove his point, Ricou cites the following passage:

> ...Brian looked up into the sky, now filled with a soft expanse of cloud, the higher edges luminous and startling against the blue. It stretched to the prairie's rim. As he stared, the gray underside carded out, and through the cloud's softness was revealed a blue well shot with sunlight. Almost as soon as it had cleared, a whisking of cloud stole over it.
>
> For one moment no wind stirred. A butterfly went pelting past. God, Brian decided, must like the...prairie. (12)

Brian does not totally escape the effects of exposure to religious views like those held by Miss MacDonald. Ronald Sutherland writes about the "insistence upon original sin"[13] that seems to haunt the childhoods of children in Canadian literature. He further observes,

> Canada...has been conditioned by the Puritan ethos....The Puritan ethos, of course, has always stressed the evil of carefree joy, even in children....[Who Has Seen the Wind] dwell[s] upon the effect that a thoroughly inculcated sense of guilt can have on a young mind....Mitchell... feel[s] that a premature and distorted sense of guilt is still an important part of the experience

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[12]Ricou 98.

[13]Ronald Sutherland, "Children of the Changing Wind," Journal of Canadian Studies 5.4 (Nov. 1970): 4.

of the child in twentieth-century Canada.[14]

Like Ross and Laurence, Mitchell explores the crippling effects of false guilt on the lives of those who suffer from it. After Miss MacDonald has instilled in him a sense of the enormity of his crime of lying, Brian lies in bed "wide-eyed, filled with awful guilt, and - much worse than that - with the fear of promised punishment" (94) from God. Later in the novel, after the Ben has been jailed and Mr. Powelly is declaring his triumph from the pulpit, Brian, who, it seems safe to assume, has come to see the clergy and organized Christianity as representative of God and right, feels again

> the sudden and physical fear of the Lord, who had stricken down the Ben. But at the same time he felt there was a wrongness in the Lord's punishment and with this he experienced a feeling of guilt at being upon the Ben's side rather than that of Mr. Powelly and the Lord. It was a feeling that deepened as the weeks followed. (261)

What Brian does not realize is that in both these cases, the guilt he feels is a result of his belief in human, not necessarily Divine, standards. The Christ who said, "'Let the little children come to Me'" (Mark 10:14) would hardly be likely to impose dreadful punishment for such common childish sins as unwashed hands and a mistaken declaration of cleanliness. It is possible that "the wind [that] swept down upon the town" (94) frightening Brian after his ordeal has not come to threaten the boy, but to avenge his unjust

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[14]Sutherland 10.

treatment at the hands of Miss MacDonald. Remembering Mr. Powelly's vendetta gainst the Ben, readers can see that the Lord may indeed have had little part in striking Ben down. The Ben's arrest and sentencing are, like the removal of Steve from the Bentley home, very human acts, and Brian may well be in error when he equates Mr. Powelly's side with that of the Lord.

Brian also feels guilt under the "unseeing stare" (297) of John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots, who look down on him from the plaques hanging in his grandmother's room. Whereas these two figures, who were so entrenched in the Protestant and Roman Catholic religions respectively, make Brian uneasy, the picture of Brian's grandfather, the man who stared down a bobcat and wrestled with the prairie, reassures the boy. Guilt, Mitchell seems to be saying, is a product of one's involvement with conventional and established norms. Only when one abandons the confines of traditional piety can he or she be free from the false guilt that is the result of attempting to squeeze oneself into such a mold.

The accepted Christian traditions do not seem adequate to contain the inhabitants and circumstances of the small town Mitchell has created. There is no provision in Knox Presbyterian Church and its theology for non-conformists like the Ben and his son. Nor is there room for those, like Saint Sammy, who live in a realm of fantasy, or indeed for

the prairie itself, its far-reaching expanse, its freedom, and its laws of nature.

Brian's thoughts when he sees the China Kids sitting in church provide a good example of the exclusive views of the Know Presbyterian Christians:

> He [Brian] saw two blue-black heads in the front row - the China Kids; they sat always in the front row, so they weren't heathen Chinee. Perhaps Old Wong was a heathen; he never came to church with the children. Their mother was dead, and Wong never came to church at all. (110)

Brian's thoughts about Old Wong are indicative of the existence in this church and community of bigotry comparable to that evident in As For Me and My House and A Jest of God. Churchgoing is the outward mark of grace in the minds of most of the Knox Christians, and Old Wong is not a churchgoer. Thus, he is to be condemned and avoided. The townsfolk take a "delicious thrill" (142) in telling each other "that Old Wong was an opium eater" (142), although no evidence to support this surmise is ever found. Mitchell writes that since the death of his wife, Old Wong

> had turned to a Stoicism that told him the world was upsetting and could take from him; he had retired to the tranquillity of his dark kitchen to sit for long, lonely periods of time. (141-42)

Old Wong's fate is similar to that of Lee Toy in A Jest of God. There is no attempt on the part of most of the "Christians" in the town to look more deeply at this man and to examine the hurt he may have experienced or to try to understand an alternate culture. Mariel Abercrombie leads

the class in "shrill tittering" on the day when Tang informs the children that her mother "had been bought by her father for a lot of money" (141).

The fact that Mitchell specifically points out the date on Knox's cornerstone, "1902" (8), seems to bear witness to the staid and unchanging character of this church and the people in it. Just as stone is inflexible and unyielding, so are the members of Knox Presbyterian. They are, for the most part, unlikely to expand their original plan to include new doctrines or ideas or those persons who do not conform to the norm that has been established.[15] If, however, the China Kids and others like them can fit themselves into the expected mold, they will be, if not accepted, at least ignored.

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[15]William Coleman makes an interesting observation about the origins of the various restrictions that govern membership in churches similar to Knox Presbyterian:

> The Pharisees [a religious sect within Judaism prevalent during the time of Christ] were desperately determined to not break the laws of God. Consequently they devised a system to keep them from even coming close to angering God. They contrived a "fence" of Pharisaic rules that, if man would keep them, would guarantee a safe distance between himself and the laws of God.... These laws became known as the <u>seyag</u> ("fence"), and they felt they had a biblical command to declare this (George Foot Moore, <u>Judaism</u>, vol. 1 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966] 259). The term has also been used by the Scotch Presbyterians. Before they serve the Lord's Supper, they explain who should not partake, and this was [sic] called "fencing the table." (William L. Coleman, <u>The Pharisees' Guide to Total Holiness</u> [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1977] 8.)

Vooie speaks with a wisdom beyond his years when, upon being coaxed by Miss Thompson to try to read, he merely quotes one of the proverbs in which his father has come to believe: "'He don't wanna little blue star for the little book. He want no money - heaven beyond his power'" (141). According to the standards of Knox Presbyterian Church, heaven is beyond the grasp of the outsiders, but it is also, readers may feel, beyond the grasp of most of the insiders as well, at least if adherence to Christ's commands is any prerequisite for attaining this end. The gold letters at the front of the sanctuary are ironic indeed: "_This Is the House of God and the Very Gate of Heaven_" (112). The letters are symbolically crooked for those entering Knox Presbyterian are not coming into God's presence; they are entering the rigid confines set up by very human people. The devout who worship there are unlikely to learn how to come closer to their God, although they may learn how to become deeply entangled in the trappings of their faith.

As was the case in _As For Me and My House_ and _A Jest of God_, the Church, as it is presented in _Who Has Seen the Wind_, is comprised largely of form without substance. Milt Palmer talks to Digby about the way in which Christian tradition covers up the realities of death:

> "Somebody dies, they're right handy with the Heavenly Land on High an' a shiny box an' flowers an' a lotta things ain't got nothin' whatsoever to do with bein' dead....They're all ascairt of reality...so they pretty her up - " (139)

Palmer's description is reminiscent of the way in which middle-class Manawaka treated death, and it is certainly apt in the case of Gerald O'Connal's funeral (241) with Mr. Powelly's "fine voice dipping and soaring in deliberate strophe" (244) and Mrs. Abercrombie singing "'There's a Beautiful Land on High'" (244).

In the same way they refuse to face death, the members and representatives of organized churches seem to be afraid of facing the actual issues of Christianity as taught by Christ. The Ben's still explodes "between the announcing of the Ladies' Auxiliary chicken dinner...and the passing of the collection plate" (129). These are the major concerns of the Church as it is depicted in this text. In the chicken dinners and the board meetings are the outward signs of a religion that has none of the power or spirit of Gospel-based Christianity. Mrs. Abercrombie and Mr. Powelly meet to plan the Auxiliary garden party (271); Bent Candy meets with the other deacons to discuss "the new minister's insistence on using the Moffat translation" (213). Real human issues, the issues with which Christ concerned Himself, are never addressed. Thus, the intolerance and injustices in the community go unchallenged. Miss Thompson sums up the situation well when, wondering what she can do about the ostracism of the China Kids, she thinks,

> The mothers of her children were good women...good cooks and good women....They organized countless chicken dinners; they went each Sunday to the Baptist, the Catholic, or the

> Anglican church, sat in Knox's glossy, pine-yellow pews or in the choir loft under the stained Jesus with a long-legged lamb in his arms....It would do no good - speaking to all the mothers would do no good; the thing was too terribly involved. (159)

On the morning Brian first experiences his "feeling" (108), he notes, "Sunday was different. Sunday was very Sabbath" (107). In the midst of this "Sabbath" quality, however, Brian has "a sudden feeling of restlessness, a hungering dissatisfaction" (107). This is followed by a "strange enchantment," "an alchemy imperceptible as the morning wind, a growing elation of such fleeting delicacy and poignancy that he dared not turn his mind to it for fear that he might spoil it" (107).[16] "The feeling" (108) seems to provide at least a partial answer to Brian's dissatisfaction, and he expects to be able to recapture this sensation in church: "He would make it come, thought Brian" (110), but "the feeling" eludes him.

Brian's grandmother demonstrates how difficult it is to experience manifestations of God in an atmosphere filled with the stifling forms of religion. Mrs. MacMurray interrupts Brian's thoughts about God and "the feeling" by

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[16]It is interesting to note that the experience Brian has at this point in the novel is not uniquely a product of W. O. Mitchell's imagination. Brian's "feeling" is a demonstration of that aspect of the Holy that the German theologian Rudolf Otto recognized and called the "'fascinans,' the element of fascination" (Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. John W. Harvey [London: Oxford University Press, 1928] 35). The more frightening aspects of God and His power that Brian encounters in Who Has Seen the Wind are manifestations of what Otto refers to as the "mysterium tremendum" (Otto 12), the mystery that terrifies.

offering her grandson a peppermint. Such an offer, like Mrs. Cameron's looking up the hymns prior to the church service, constitutes a time-honoured custom of churchgoers that has nothing to do with one's relationship with the Divine. Mitchell says of Brian, "Then his mind was on the sweetness of the candy cooling under his tongue. You couldn't get a feeling with a peppermint in your mouth, he thought" (112). Despite her kind intentions, Mrs. MacMurray, with her traditionally-accepted gesture, completely disrupts Brian's train of thought and eliminates the possibility that he will achieve any understanding of God during the morning service.

D. G. Jones says of the portrayal of organized churches and their members in Canadian literature:

> It is the "purer form of religion" that frequently becomes one of the principal barriers to the fuller discovery of that holy and mysterious nature of man, and which helps to ensure that man remains a stranger to the movements of the inner life....It is the conventional Christianity of the Reverend Mr Powelly, the Presbyterian minister, that seeks to expel or to bind the breath of the spirit in Who Has Seen the Wind.[17]

Mitchell uses the symbol of "a crucified child" (162) to illustrate the way in which the Church and its conventions are not only once again crucifying Christ and the principles He stands for, but are also killing the basic goodness and truth in the children to whom these traditions are taught. The child is held in the crucified position by a man and a

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[17]Jones 61.

woman. These are the adults who are passing on to their children the dry, traditional ideas of justice and Christianity that they themselves have been taught and have come to accept. This image is reinforced by the "black, minute crosses [telephone poles] where the town was" (198) that Brian sees as he and his friends walk home after their first visit with Saint Sammy.

Mitchell's picture of those Christians who pursue their faith within the framework of mainstream denominations is a blatantly critical one, but his portrait of those who have adopted a fervent, evangelical style of religion is filled with ambiguity. This is the kind of Christianity practised by Ab, Sean's hired man. Ab, Mitchell tells his readers, was converted at a revival meeting held by a travelling evangelist, and since then he has made it a point to force his beliefs on those around him: "It was a shame that Ab could not take his religion or leave it alone, that he thought it too good a thing to deny the man he worked for" (116). Sean reports, "'Hayin' time - seedin' - harvest, he's at me! Like a goddam fly he is - buzzin' an' buzzin' till I'm twitchy as a cow at flytime!'" (117), and Mitchell writes that Ab

> had on one occasion hidden five of his [Sean's] pipes, broken a carefully colored meershaum against the grindstone, and dropped five tins of Black Stag cut plug into what he sincerely believed the only proper place for tobacco. (220-221)

For all his piety, though, Ab does not display a particu-

larly Christian attitude as far as patience and charity are concerned. When Brian tries to drive his uncle's horses and succeeds in destroying the rack to which they are hitched, Ab says vehemently, "'Wisht he'd bust his head wide open!'" (233).

Ab himself is described as "an insect of a man with a wry, sad little face and a startling light in his eyes. ...his voice had the sad whine of a mosquito's song" (221). Mitchell writes that supper in Sean's home is "preceded always by the unintelligible and almost whimpering grace he [Ab] recited" (221). Physically, Ab has a "game leg" that necessitates his using a "rocker arrangement" (224) to help him walk. Ab is scarcely a man overflowing with the joy and abundant life promised by Christ to His followers.

Not only is Ab unattractive in a physical sense, he is also aberrant mentally. Ab seems unable to appreciate the beautiful or the perfect. His favourite cow, Noreen, is asthmatic, and Ab takes a very unChristian pride in her deformity. When Annie, encouraged by Brian, gets glasses that straighten the cast in her eye, Ab no longer has any interest in the woman. Mitchell does not explain Ab's aversion to beauty. Perhaps the man begrudges any living thing the health and attractiveness he lacks, or perhaps the dark and dour kind of Christianity Ab embraces is so based on the virtues of suffering and personal deprivation that there is no place for the beautiful.

On the other hand, Ab does take charge when Sean protests that he will not get a nipple for Brian so that he can bottle-feed the runt pig he loves. "'Oh, yes you will,'" contradicts Ab. "'You git that there nipple so's the kid kin feed the pig hisself'" (225). Ab also demonstrates kindness when he comes to tell Brian about Gerald O'Connal's death:

> Ab did not start the horses. Upon his wry little face lay an expression as gentle as a benediction. He cleared his throat.
> "Yer Paw," he said. "Telegraft lady phoned us last night, kid. Yer Paw down to Rochester - he went an' died." (237)

Even though he has faults, Ab, like Calla in <u>A Jest of God</u>, is still outside the dictates of the mainstream denominations, and therefore, in accordance with the view put forward by both Mitchell and Laurence, there is some room for compassion in the man's nature. He is also, like Philip and Mrs. Bentley in <u>As For Me and My House</u>, at least attempting to practise the Christianity of the Gospels rather than the cold and form-ridden religion dictated by tradition. It seems at times that Mitchell may even be sanctioning, at least to some extent, the views of Christianity and life presented by Ab. In spite of his flaws, Ab gains a wife who loves him, and their union is blessed with the advent of twin girls. Sean's hired man has, apparently, been rewarded for his virtues, sparse as they may be.

The ambiguities that are apparent in the case of Ab

increase where Sammy Belterlaben is concerned. Some of Sammy's characteristics are similar to those manifested by the hired man. The possessiveness Ab demonstrates with respect to Noreen and her snuffles is intensified in Sammy's feeling about his Clydes. In Sammy's case, the possessiveness has become so great that he has even begun to attribute spiritual good to this quality. According to Sammy, the Lord has told him that he cannot enter heaven unless he is in sole possession of the horses. Possessiveness is also apparent in Sammy's collection of underwear labels. In the same way more rational Christians are exhorted by traditional hymns to count their blessings, Sammy counts his labels again and again: "He had counted them as he always counted when troubled, count your labels, count them one by one" (267). Ab's dislike of beauty is mirrored in Sammy's decision to abandon all luxury and live in a piano box.

Sammy sincerely believes that he is in communion with the Lord and that he is following His dictates. In fact, Sammy believes that he has been designated by the Lord as "'Saint Sammy'" and "'Jehovah's Hired Man'" (265). Like the God of <u>As For Me and My House</u>, Sammy's God inhabits the wind and the dustclouds. In Sammy's experience,

> the wind, turning upon itself, had built up a black body from the topsoil, had come whirling toward him in a smoking funnel that snatched up tumbleweeds, lifting them and rolling them over in its heart. The voice of the Lord had spoken to him. (264)

There is, indeed, Scriptural precedent in the book of Job

for the Lord's method of speaking to Sammy "out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1). William New says of Sammy that he "mystically in age can know (to his own satisfaction) the 'majesty of His glory' and 'the greatness of His work.'"[18] Ronald Sutherland, however, calls him "the religious nut Saint Sammy."[19]

Most of the characters in Who Has Seen the Wind are sure that Sammy is insane. As Sean observes,

> "Yearsa gittin' rusted out an' saw flied out an' cutwormed out an' 'hoppered out an' hailed out an' droughted out an' rusted out an' smutted out; he up an' got good an' goddam tired out. Crazier'n a cut calf." (118)

In one of the ambiguities of this text, however, Mitchell tells readers that when Brian is with Sammy, "for breathless moments he had been alive as he had never been before, passionate for the thing that slipped through the grasp of his understanding and eluded him" (199). Brian himself thinks that "A thing couldn't come closer through a crazy man gone crazy from the prairie" (199), and yet he feels that during the time spent with Sammy "he was closer" (198) to the spiritual understanding that he has been seeking for so long.

Although with the creation of Sammy Mitchell may seem to be supporting the idea of mysticism as a means of communicating with God, it should be noted that the faith

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[18]New 28.

[19]Sutherland 9.

practised by Sammy, the mystic, has serious limitations. Sammy does succeed in making the Scriptures relevant to the prairie situation. In fact, Ronald Sutherland writes that "Mitchell's high point...is reached in the monologues - amazing concoctions of biblical phrases, rural dialect and evangelical rhetoric"[20] that Sammy delivers. Laurence Ricou notes that for Sammy,

> The prairie is a very real extension of God's kingdom on earth - the location of the garden of Eden, as we learn from Sammy's version of Genesis....God himself speaks to Saint Sammy in the idiom of the prairie farmer....The effect of this prairie version of the creation and the Creator is to humanize God, not so much by making him [sic] a man, as by making him [sic] more accessible to humans. Saint Sammy's God, removed from the traditional conception of the established church, becomes more immediate without losing his [sic] fascinating inscrutability.[21]

The connection Sammy makes between the prairie and Scripture is merely a verbal one, however. Sammy's religious beliefs do not cause him to make any practical contribution to the world around him. Although Ricou states that "For Sammy man's noblest vocation - indeed the reason for man's creation - is farming the prairie,"[22] Sammy does not, like Brian's Uncle Sean, preach against improper farming methods and call for change that will benefit many people. Although his prayers seem to result in the outpouring of the Lord's

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[20]Sutherland 9.

[21]Ricou 102, 103.

[22]Ricou 103.

vengeance on Bent Candy, Sammy, living alone in his piano box and interacting with very few of his fellow human beings, is unable to make any sizable contribution toward righting the wrongs that are evident in Who Has Seen the Wind.

Although Sammy adopts the role of an Old Testament prophet, announcing the Lord's condemnation of the town and predicting the vengeance that will come upon it, few people are near enough to benefit from his pronouncements:

> Sammy's arm with its hand clawed, lifted, and pointed out the town low on the horizon. "Fer they have played the harlot an' the fornicator in the sighta the Lord! An' there is sorra an' sighin' over the facea the prairie - herb an' the seed thereoff thirsteth after the water which don't cometh! The cutworm cutteth - the rust rusteth an' the 'hopper hoppeth!...He shall rain ontuh them fire an' brimstone - down on the bare-ass adulteresses - " (196-97)

Unfortunately, Brian and his friends are the only ones to hear this tirade, and they understand little of it and can only discuss the meanings of "'harlot'" and "'fornicator,'" scarcely the sort of questions Sammy means to inspire.

Christ told His followers, "'You are the salt of the earth'" (Matt. 5:13), and He also called them "'the light of the world'" (Matt. 5:14). This kind of witness to the power of Christ and His Gospel is not part of Sammy's experience, however. Although he lives on the prairie, Sammy is not actually a part of the world in which he exists. O. S. Mitchell notes that Sammy

> is living in an Old Testament fantasy in recoil

> from his harsh experiences as a farmer. Uncle Sean's description of him as a "cut [castrated] calf" is apt; he has been emasculated in that he is incapable of effectively confronting prairie farm life....Saint Sammy has regressed and is an adult version of Brian playing with R. W. God.[23]

Whereas Brian's God answered him in the childish terms with which Brian was familiar, Sammy's God also speaks to the old man in a language he can understand. His promises to Sammy are rooted in the richness of Scriptural description and allegory that have become so much a part of the hermit's life. Sammy tells Brian and his friends,

> "The Glorya the Lord come outa the East, an' His voice was the wind in the smooth-on barley field! An' I called out to the Lord; He answered me from the bellya the burnin' prairie. 'Bent Candy won't git 'em,' He seth ontuh me. 'They shall be shod with silver horseshoes - dimonds an' em'ralds shall be in their britchin', an' their halter shanks shall be of purest gold! I say ontuh you, Saint Sammy, don't sell them there horses ontuh Bent Candy!'" (195)

Sammy is like the very young Brian when he looks on his God as an avenging Presence who will offer him protection from his enemies, specifically from Bent Candy. In another of the ambiguities of this text, Sammy's ideas in this regard appear to be proven correct. With respect to Sammy, Brian's grandmother observes, "'The Lord looks after His own'" (119), and this seems to be true. When Bent Candy tries to force Sammy to sell his Clydes, Sammy threatens Candy:

> "An' the voicea the Lord come ontuh me, sayin', 'I kin do the drouthin' out an' the

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[23] O. S. Mitchell, "Tall Tales in the Fiction of W. O. Mitchell," Canadian Literature 108 (Spring 1986): 28.

> hailin' out an' the 'hopperin' out an' the blowin' out till Bent Candy gits good an' tired out! She shall come to pass - '" (268)

The storm Sammy cites as an agent of God's vengeance does come on the exact day Sammy predicts it will, and it does demolish his enemy's barn. Ken Mitchell writes,

> The incident suggests that a man like Saint Sammy, mad hermit and an outcast from society, living on the open prairie like one of his own Clydes unbroken and gone wild, is a man much closer to God than, for example, Bent Candy, a deacon of the Baptist Church. And despite his somewhat Old Testament viewpoint, he is much more a Christian man than the Rev. Mr. Powelly, the Presbyterian minister who <u>seems</u> to profess Christian virtues but who is a man guided by social, not spiritual laws.[24]

It is worthy of note that following the windstorm, which is, presumably, a proof of the validity of Sammy's claim to be in direct communication with his Maker, Candy not only relents and allows Sammy to continue to live in his piano box on what is now Candy's land, sole possessor of his Clydes, but he reacts with a kind of reverence when Sammy next prophesies before him, giving him a prairie version of Isaiah 35:

> "'The prairie shall be glad, an' she shall blossom like the rose! Yay, she shall blossom abundantly! The eyesa the blind shall see, an' the earsa the deef shall hear! The lame is gonna leap like the jack rabbit, an' the water shall spout ontuh the prairie, an' the sloughs shall be full - plumb full!'"
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> ...
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> "Amen," said Mr. Candy. (273)

This is probably the closest Candy comes to being truly

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[24]K. Mitchell 39.

reverent, and Sammy seems to be the agent of the Lord who inspires this reaction.

Brian recognizes a childlike, unquestioning closeness to God in Sammy Belterlaben. Mitchell tells his readers that when Sammy gives his unique account of the story of creation, he speaks "In a monotone, with the singsonging stress of a child's Christmas recitation" (197), and God, it seems, honours such faith.[25] Still, readers are left with questions about the actual value of Sammy's belief. Although Christ urged His followers to exercise a childlike trust, the kind of simple faith displayed by Sammy in his prayer for vengeance on Bent Candy, one might reasonably expect that, in due time, a believer will progress to maturity in the Christian life. The apostle Paul writes, "Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature" (1 Cor. 14:20). The childlike quality of one's trust in God need never change, but it is logical to assume that the ends toward which that trust is directed will alter as the believer grows into spiritual adulthood. Sammy's faith, however, remains childishly egocentric. He is concerned with his own welfare, spiritual and otherwise, rather than with the well-being of his fellows and his society.

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[25]Such response from the Almighty is in accordance with Christ's words, "'Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it'" (Mark 10:15; cf. Luke 18:17).

Although on one level Sammy does seem in some mysterious way to be in close communion with his God, on another level Mitchell seems to be equating Sammy's fervency with insanity.[26] One thing is certain, however, with respect to Mitchell's presentation of Sammy and his faith: "Even the religious ravings of Saint Sammy are more convincing than the Rev. Mr. Powelly's sermons...."[27] The ambiguity that is present in Mitchell's portrait of fundamentalist Christianity may be, like the ambiguity that played such an important part in As For Me and My House, part of the author's statement that easy answers and judgements are not possible when dealing with a subject as complex as the nature of Christianity.

Mitchell does not suggest that the methods of worship employed by mainstream denominations and the kinds of thought and action subscribed to by fundamentalist believers are the only ways of dealing with spiritual matters and questions. Like Ross and Laurence, he allows his readers to consider whether or not some alternate system of thought can and should replace Christianity with all its imperfections.

At least as important as his examination in this novel

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[26]The possible relationship between madness and sainthood is not an idea exclusive to this novel. It is, in fact, examined in some detail in Robertson Davies' Fifth Business, which will be discussed later in this thesis.

[27]Jones 38.

of the actual practice of Christianity is Mitchell's concern with the nature of God, and thinkers like Hislop, Digby, and Milt Palmer attempt to turn to the philosopher Berkeley for answers to their questions about life and God and His role in the universe. Even Brian, in an attempt to understand the world around him and the origin of his "feeling" (108), eventually tries to grasp Berkeley's theories as they are explained by Digby. Colin Brown describes Berkeley's system of thought in the following way:

> He agreed [with John Locke] that what we actually perceive is not the outside world of material things, but ideas or perceptions. From here he went on to argue that things exist in so far as they are perceived. But this does not mean that objects simply cease to exist when there is no-one around to perceive them. For they are always perceived by the infinite mind, God.[28]

Laurence Ricou points out that according to Berkeley, "man is an idea of God."[29] When carried to its logical conclusion with respect to Who Has Seen the Wind, Berkeley's theory suggests that all the people in Mitchell's little town and its environs are part of one whole that exists in God's mind. There are no exclusions as there are when an effort is made to fit everyone into the traditional Christian norm.

Brian's ideas about the Christian religion are actually a composite of Christian thought and pagan superstition.

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[28]Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith (1968; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979) 64.

[29]Ricou 104.

Brian looks to the Christian God for the power he needs to defend him from his enemies, but when he is on his way to see God in order to ask Him to do something about Mrs. MacMurray whom, at that point in the novel, Brian regards as a tyrant, he is equally ready to look for solace in the superstition Forbsie holds out to him:

> "Step on a crack," Forbsie sang, "break your mother's back!"
> Brian sang, "Step on a crack, break my gramma's back!" He did not miss stepping upon a single crack in the three blocks that took them to the great, gray, sandstone church.... (8)

When he creates R. W. God, Brian again demonstrates a blend of Christian ideas and superstition. Because Brian cannot grasp the idea of omnipresence, his God must travel to get from place to place. Brian conceives of heaven as a place in the sky, so he must give God, the Person who lives there, the ability to fly. Thus, he combines superstitious ideas about witches with the Christian concept of God and enables R. W. God to ride about on a vacuum cleaner, a modern broom.

The corruption of Christian ideas by the addition of elements of superstition is not exclusive to Mitchell's four-year-old protagonist. When confronted by Saint Sammy and his prediction of the Lord's vengeance, Bent Candy, deacon of the Baptist Church,

> reached behind himself and knocked with his knuckles against the manure-fork handle leaning against his new barn. He *was* a religious man, and years of prairie farming had deepened in him faith in a fate as effective as that of Greek drama. (268)

Candy does not understand the true nature of Christianity or the concept of the omnipotence of God any better than Brian does. He still believes knocking on wood in deference to the gods of pagan superstition will give him protection against God's wrath. He, like Brian, is willing to call on any force that will take his side and offer him protection. The Christians in this novel have, like many of the characters in As For Me and My House and A Jest of God, only "a form of godliness...[without] its power" (2 Tim. 3:5). Thus, it is necessary for some of Mitchell's characters to look to more ancient sources for the strength and protection they so badly need.

In Who Has Seen the Wind Mitchell draws on a concept that has become part of traditional Christian thought, the idea that a child is more spiritually aware than are adults, even if the child has never been trained theologically or exposed to philosophy. Mitchell does not make it clear where Brian has gained his elementary training in spiritual matters. When Brian first meets Forbsie Hoffman, however, he is sure that his baby brother, Bobbie, is "'going to heaven'" "'where God stays'" (6). Maggie O'Connal later discusses the C.G.I.T. candlelight service with Mrs. Abercrombie, thus proving that the O'Connals do attend the Presbyterian services, but it is evident that Brian has never been inside Knox Presbyterian Church. Forbsie tells the astonished Brian, "'God lives right in town. Over

there....At His house'" (7) and goes on to describe the stained glass windows in the church for his new friend by telling him, "'He's [God's] all grapes and bloody. He carries around a lamb'" (7). Enthusiastically, Brian proposes a visit to God's house, believing that he will meet God Himself there, a God whom Brian understands to be perfectly human, who may sometimes be unable to answer His door because he is "in the bathroom" (9), and who eats porridge from "a dish as big as the prairie" and "squirt[s] milk onto it from a long hose" (21):

> Brian's early efforts to discover God's true nature are firmly rooted in his day-to-day experience. God becomes a very human figure.... Brian grasps at, but cannot possess, the notion of transcendence. For him, God is only another man, albeit a giant.[30]

In a great deal of his interview with the Presbyterian minister it is, in fact, Brian, with his imagination and enthusiasm, who supplies Reverend Hislop with information. In response to Brian's question, "'What are those - with things to their backs - wings?'" (23), the minister replies, "'Angels'" (23), and Brian goes on to explain to Mr. Hislop the details about these beings:

> "And wherever they go they fly there - all the time up in the sky, and there's sunshine, and it's blue, and heaven's where God is....Their nests are white too. They lay very white eggs." (23, 24)

Similarly, when the minister agrees that God is in heaven,

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[30]Ricou 5.

Brian assures him that "'He [God] has lots of fun....He has lots of fun up there'" (23). Brian is acquainted with the popular ideas about angels and God, but his articulations are not bound by traditional Christian frames of reference. The conventional answers given by Reverend Hislop seem drab and unexciting when contrasted with Brian's imaginative responses. The adults in Brian's world try to reduce God into terms Brian, the child, can understand. Brian, however, senses instinctively what Rachel in A Jest of God had to discover, that God cannot be made to conform entirely to human ideas. His attempt to draw the Deity results in a page of rather unorthodox Gods:

> On the paper he made blue with his crayon. And God was there. He made a yellow God, yellow for the round part, and green legs and purple eyes, and red arms, and that was God. He made another God and another and another till there were Gods all over the paper. He added arms and more arms, legs and more legs; those were spider Gods, of course. (32)

God is, simply, God, and He may well be different from the traditional conceptions of Him put forward by artists and clergymen.

Still, Brian yearns to know God. His initial understanding of the Deity is the result of thinking that encompasses, perhaps better than do traditional theological ideas, some of the most important aspects of the Creator. Because Brian has, somehow, become aware of God as the Agent of Divine punishment, he conceives of Him as a Being who will make his grandmother "squeal out loud" when He "got

ahold of her" (21). Brian also believes that God tells him, "'I will get Artie to look through a hole in a fence, and then I will kick him real hard....I will give him thousands of kicks. I will give him hundreds'" (33). The capacity for vengeance is, however, only one aspect of the Being Brian creates as a playfellow. His God is, as O. S. Mitchell puts it, "a conglomeration of his immediate experience of other people in his world."[31] God is generally considered by Christian believers to be the embodiment of good, and Brian takes what he likes most and considers best about the adults who play major parts in his life and combines these attributes into his conception of the Creator.

For Brian, the most fascinating aspect of his grandmother is the fact that she belches and is not reprimanded for this. He tells Mrs. Hislop about this idiosyncrasy when he talks with her, and when he is very angry with his grandmother, his resolve is not to listen anymore "When her stomach sang after dinner" (4). The belches themselves are, to a small boy's mind, accomplishments to be admired, and the fact that his grandmother is able to belch publicly without reprimand is, for Brian, a true mark of the esteem in which she is held. Thus, he borrows this habit from his grandmother and gives it to his God. Although Brian resents his grandmother's exercise of authority, he does respond to

[31]O. S. Mitchell 26.

it and respect it. He consequently makes God a figure of authority, but a higher one than his grandmother. God, Brian believes, can and will punish Mrs. MacMurray and restore her to what he sees as her proper role in his world.

Mitchell writes of Brian's Uncle Sean that he

> awed them [Brian and Bobbie] as no other grownup could hope to; his deep and booming voice and the broad barn-door build of him were enough in themselves to inspire reverence. (114)

When Sean stands up for Brian against Mrs. MacMurrav and defeats her in her attempts to make Brian wear a middy, "Brian looked up to his uncle's face with plain worship in his eyes" (15). Brian puts something of this uncle he reveres into his conception of God. Because he loves the stories Sean tells him, Brian makes God a "'little man'" (16) much like the leprechaun his uncle tells him "'popped out of a gopher hole in my south forty'" (16). Brian's God wears "a hat like Uncle Sean's" (32) and rubber boots that may well be similar to those worn by his farmer uncle.

Brian also borrows some of his father's attributes for his God. The boy tells Gerald O'Connal that God has a pipe like his, wears gold cuff links like those with which Gerald fumbles, and recites "Casey at the Bat" and "When Father Rode the Goat," although He does not do the recitations quite as well as Gerald does: "'He can't remember sometimes - all the things'" (38). The gold cuff links Brian's father wears and the recitations he does mark him as truly worthy of note in Brian's eyes, so much so that later, when Gerald

dies, an older Brian still remembers these things as being part of the essential substance of his father.

Brian also borrows from his father the habit of addressing men by their initials only as a way of indicating the importance of these people. Thus, God becomes R. W. God, or simply R. W., a designation that sets Him apart as Someone of consequence. Brian marks his God as a truly exceptional Person by attaching the initials "B.V.D." (33) to His name. Like the mystic Saint Sammy, Brian appears to believe that underwear labels hold great spiritual significance. In giving his God a number of his father's characteristics, Brian is not merely endowing his creation with the traits of someone whom he loves. His thinking is similar to that of the writers of Scripture who designated God as Father and attributed to Him many of the characteristics of a human parent.

When formulating his ideas about God, Brian borrows from his mother as well. From her he takes strength of character, for Mitchell portrays Mrs. O'Connal as the strong member of the family. He says of the feeling that Brian and Bobbie have toward their mother, "...for the mother there was respect, a recognition of the vein of iron in her will" (200). It is also likely that some of Brian's ideas about God as a Being who is just, but ready to punish wrongdoing, come from Maggie O'Connal:

> With the discernment that children have, Brian and Bobbie....felt in their mother an immutability

> that made the consequences of wrongdoing inevitable....she could not take the easy way with her children. She expected much of them.... (78)

Even though Brian is not able to grasp concepts such as God's omniscience, and R. W. God must ask him, "'Has the baby been sick?'" (33), "Brian's instincts about God are not entirely misdirected."[32] It is not surprising that in the midst of conflict within his church and interesting, through unresolved, philosophical discussions with Digby, Reverend Hislop finds the memory of Brian's visit and the boy's certainty about his beliefs "comforting" (32).

The idea of the spiritually aware child has been perhaps most powerfully expressed by the romantic poet William Wordsworth in his Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood in which he hypothesized that children come into this world from a former Divine existence "trailing clouds of glory."[33] This poem is actually referred to by Digby when he looks at Brian and muses at the "wisdom beyond years" the boy seems to display. He thinks,

> That was it - the look upon Brian's face - the same expression that had puzzled him on the Young Ben's: maturity in spite of the formlessness of childish features, wisdom without years. "Intimations of Immortality," he thought. (297)

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[32]Ricou 98.

[33]William Wordsworth, "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944) 4: 281, l. 65.

When Brian tells Digby, "'I don't get the feeling any more. I - don't think I will - get it any more'" (296), Digby responds, "'Perhaps...you've grown up'" (297). Digby's words recall Wordsworth's lines:

> There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight,
> To me did seem
> Appareled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream.
> It is not now as it hath been of yore -
> Turn whereso'er I may,
> By night or day,
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
>
> ...
>
> ...yet I know, where'er I go,
> That there hath passed away a glory from the earth.[34]

O. S. Mitchell points out that Wordsworth was actually giving his own version of "theories of pre-existence and reminiscence"[35] proposed by Plato. In this regard, readers should note that Hislop refers to Plato as well as Christ when he speaks of the world's great moralists and advocates of truth:

> "They were no different from men today....Just as imaginative - as sensitive. There hasn't been any advance in the things that count - not in generalizations - it was all there with Plato - with Christ." (30)

William New draws attention to Brian's "childlike awareness of a different order."[36] In accordance with the theory of

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[34]Wordsworth, "Ode" 279, ll. 1-9, 17-18.

[35]O. S. Mitchell 35.

[36]New 30.

pre-existence that is put forward in this novel, it may not be merely an inadequate understanding of the principles of procreation that causes Brian to insist to his friends that "'God sends [babies]'" (204).

This theory of pre-existence can also be applied to the Young Ben. O. S. Mitchell points out that the Ben's tale of the Young Ben's birth, in which he tells his listeners, "'The Ben was borned growed-up'" (85), "echoes the theme of the wise or mature child who is intuitively in touch with the Divine."[37] W. O. Mitchell writes that Digby "had wondered often if the Young Ben were a child" (75). In still another allusion to the theory of heavenly pre-existence, Mitchell writes that it seems to Brian "that at some time he had known him [the Young Ben] intimately" (88). The suggestion is that the instinctive recognition and link between the boys may exist because both share the memory of the glory they have experienced as well as the innate moral sense that accompanied that glory. Mitchell calls this attraction between the two boys "a strengthening bond...an extrasensory brothership" (89). He writes that after Brian's traumatic introduction to the facts of life, he

> stopped and stared across at the Young Ben; he never saw the other boy without excitement stirring within him; as ever it was a wordless attraction strengthening with each additional and fleeting glimpse he got of the Young Ben. He felt an impulse...to cross the street and walk along with the Young Ben, felt instinctively that

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[37]O. S. Mitchell 26.

somehow it would help him. (206)

Brian senses that the Young Ben is the only proper confidant for him, the only one who will understand the distress caused by growing away from the Divine and closer to earthly reality. He feels that the Young Ben will, consequently, be able to offer him comfort.

Another major departure from conventional Christian thought is Mitchell's promotion of another Wordsworthian concept, that God is actually to be found through nature.[38] Brian's initial conversation with Reverend Hislop suggests that the minister subscribes to a belief similar to that found in lines such as the following from the poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey":

> ...For I have learned
> To look on nature....And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things.[39]

Hislop tells Brian, "'He [God] looks after things'" (23).

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[38]Whether or not Mitchell actually believes the romantic ideas put forward in Wordsworth's poems, he has grudgingly admitted that such concepts do, indeed, play a major part in Who Has Seen the Wind. See W. O. Mitchell, "An Interview with W. O. Mitchell," with David O'Rourke, Essays on Canadian Writing 20 (Winter 1980-81): 152.

[39]William Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944) 2: 261-62, ll. 88-89, 93-102.

When Brian asks, "'What things?'" Hislop responds,

> "Flowers - birds - people - things. He makes meadow larks sing. If an ant climbs a grass-blade - a - a grasshopper spits tobacco juice - that's God."
>
> ...
>
> "...When a butterfly winks his wings - that's God too....Ladybugs, kittens, pups, gophers: they're all - [God]." (23-24)

Hislop may, in fact, be trying to give Brian a sense of the omnipresence and omnipotence of the Creator. He also succeeds, however, in making an undeniable connection between nature and the Divine, and it is this pantheistic concept that continues to play a major part in this novel. Brian's first experience with "the feeling" comes as a result of an encounter with the natural world, and Ken Mitchell writes that the occurrence "can only be called a transcendental vision." He says simply, "...nature - Mitchell asserts - is God."[40]

Mitchell uses some effective imagery to sustain this idea of a link between religion and nature. He writes that a gopher watches Brian "from its pulpit hole" (11). A weasel has "its slant head bolt upright in Presbyterian propriety" (269), and a butterfly has "its wings closed up like hands held palms together [in prayer]" (269). The prairie and the wind are often linked to Brian's spiritual quest: "Always, he [Brian] noted, the feeling [Brian's word for his experience of Divine revelation] was most exquisite

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[40]K. Mitchell 35, 34.

upon the prairie or when the wind blew" (123). Laurence Ricou points to the connection between nature and the spiritual in Who Has Seen the Wind when he writes,

> Mitchell's basically romantic outlook is that meaning is somehow to be detected in the prairie itself. Like Wordsworth he is not content simply with a carefully realized sense of place, but must look through the place to find its "spirit."... Prairie is both the question and the answer.[41]

In his preface, Mitchell clearly points to the Christian identification of the wind with the Holy Spirit: "Many interpreters of the Bible believe the wind to be symbolic of Godhood."[42] The wind is, in fact, a vehicle of Divine revelation in both the Old and New Testaments, and in this novel the wind can be a symbol either of vengeance or of love:

> Brian can no more visualize God than he can the wind that passes by.
>
> The wind is a common literary device for symbolizing God's presence, but it is especially effective in Who Has Seen the Wind. In this prairie setting, it is - like nature (or God) - hostile and benign, creative and destructive.... "Symbolic of Godhood" as Mitchell suggests, the wind brings both rain and drought to the prairie - holding the power of life and death over the settlers.[43]

W. O. Mitchell, in fact, attributes to the wind characteristics of a living being. When Brian makes his first trip to see God,

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[41]Ricou 101.

[42]W. O. Mitchell, preface n.p.

[43]K. Mitchell 34-35.

> A fervent whirlwind passed the brown house with the woman [Mrs. Hislop] standing on the porch; at the trees before the church, it rose suddenly, setting every leaf in violent motion, as though an invisible hand had gripped the trunks and shaken them. (8)

When Brian makes his first visit to the prairie, the wind blows against his back with a "steady urgency" (10) and is "a pervasive sighing through great emptiness...warm and living against his face and in his hair" (11). The wind ruffles Brian's hair as he knocks on the church door as if it is God Himself touching the boy. Like an agent of Divine communication, the wind whispers truth that Brian can only sense and understand with the inner, intuitive part of himself. Mitchell writes that the four-year-old boy

> was aware that the yard was not still. Every grass-blade and leaf and flower seemed to be breathing, or perhaps, whispering - something to him - something for him....Within himself, Brian felt a soft explosion of feeling. It was one of completion and of culmination. (60)

After Brian's father dies, the wind "whisper[s] through the long, dead grasses" (246) helping Brian to come to an understanding of the cycle of human life and death. There is, however, a great deal of blurring in this text between the Christian idea of the wind as a symbol of Jehovah or of the Holy Spirit and the pantheistic concept of the wind and the rest of nature as vehicles for the animating spirit that controls the universe.[44] With his equation of the natural

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[44]Although often associated with the supernatural in this text, the wind is not always linked with the heavenly aspect of this power. Mitchell tells readers that just

world with the Deity, Mitchell introduces the idea of an impersonal God, an idea that Robertson Davies will also develop in Fifth Business.

Brian's grandmother is a character who demonstrates well the link established in Who Has Seen the Wind between the Divine and nature. Mrs. MacMurray's strictness and rigidity, as portrayed in the first part of the novel, mark her as an old lady set in all her ways, including her religious beliefs. The soapstone plaques of John Knox and Mary Queen of Scots, representatives of traditional Christian faiths, that hang over her bed may represent the inflexibility of the religious beliefs that have become part of her life. Mrs. MacMurray, staid Presbyterian, does, however, feel a sense of communion with the prairie and is drawn to it and to her memories of prairie life. She seems to exhibit an understanding of life and spiritual matters beyond that of many of the other characters in the novel, and her wisdom is a wisdom born out of her life on the prairie rather than out of her experience with the organized

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before Brian sees the two-headed calf, a phenomenon that upsets him and causes him to reassess some of his ideas about God, "a dust-devil came whirling" (175). Before giving more information about Gerald O'Connal's ominously unidentified sickness, Mitchell writes that the wind "whirled toward the center of the town [where Mr. O'Connal has his drugstore] in feverish little dust-devils" (189). As their name suggests, these miniature whirlwinds may perhaps signify some demonic force that co-exists with the elements of the Divine in the wind. Readers may be reminded of Mrs. Bentley's nocturnal walk away from the fire during her time on Stanley and Laura's ranch. She, too, began to sense hostile supernatural forces at work in the landscape.

Church. She establishes a link between religion and nature when she tries to help Brian understand rabbit birth by telling him,

> "'Tis too bad ye're not a farm boy - there'd be no need then for this argy-bargyin'. What ye tell [Gerald O'Connal's modified facts of life] is the how - all right. The why - that's another thing. That's for the Lord." (170)

Mrs. MacMurray's adherence to strict religious form and principles does not make her an endearing character. It is when, growing older and closer to death, she turns to the prairie as well as to her Bible for comfort that Brian's relationship with his grandmother becomes more intimate, and readers may see her as a more sympathetic character. As death draws nearer, traditional, organized religion seems to be inadequate to meet Mrs. MacMurray's needs:

> As [Brian's grandmother] increasingly senses the closeness of death, she seems to feel a corresponding need for the presence of the natural world, the prairie. She asks Brian to open the window, that is, to remove the barrier between herself and the outdoors - the wind and the presence of her God.[45]

It becomes very important to Mrs. MacMurray to have her window open at all times, and perhaps the most poignant portrait of Brian's grandmother is that of the old woman during the violent windstorm when she sits near her window "quite still in her rocker, her hands black with blown dust driven into the room between frantic curtains" (271). Even in the cold and snow of winter, the grandmother wants the

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[45]K. Mitchell 33.

window open, and when Maggie O'Connal, concerned about her mother's health, shuts it, Mrs. MacMurray "got up laboriously and with difficulty opened her window [again]" (280). The extremes of prairie weather apparently hold no terror for Brian's grandmother for in them she sees manifestations of her God. She seems to draw a sustaining strength from the natural world, and this prairie influence tempers and softens her outlook on life and those around her. Still, to the end of her life Mrs. MacMurray remains a product of the traditional faith in which she has been raised. Mitchell writes that Brian's grandmother "managed a departure typically Scotch and Presbyterian in its restraint, a predestined event of logical finality. In her own words, her time had come" (295). The last days of Mrs. MacMurray's life constitute one of the ambiguities in the novel. Traditional religious concepts are set against natural physical reality, in this case, the reality of death.

The Christian religion, as it is practised by its representatives in this novel, is clearly not admirable. When Mitchell explores alternate systems of mythologies, however, it is evident, as was the case in As For Me and My House and A Jest of God, that rather than offering answers, other kinds of beliefs merely present other questions. The philosophic ideas put forward by Berkeley and read by Digby are too complicated and obscure to be understood by Milt

Palmer, the shoemaker, or by Brian, the child. By using the wind, at least on one level, as a symbol of God and the Holy Spirit, Mitchell implies that religion is widespread and that its influence is felt by everyone, regardless of class or age. Thus, it does not seem likely that he is suggesting that the answers to a spiritual quest can be found exclusively in a philosophy that only the highly-educated can understand. The superstitions called on by various characters are even less effectual than are the established concepts of Christianity. Brian's grandmother's back does not break, even though Brian steps on every crack on his way to the church. Bent Candy's barn is demolished in spite of the fact that he dutifully knocks on wood.

Mitchell also makes clear that children are not automatically close to God and to spiritual truth. During Brian's first meeting with Forbsie Hoffman, Forbsie gives evidence that, although he is approximately Brian's age, he does not have the interest in spiritual concepts that Brian displays. Forbsie is perfectly satisfied to believe that the real God is a stained glass picture. When Brian suggests that they go and visit God, Forbsie responds, "'I'm going home, I think. It's suppertime, and I better get home'" (8). While Forbsie has little interest in exploring religion, Mariel is cruel and prejudiced where the China Kids are concerned, and Art demonstrates unthinking brutality in the matter of the gopher hunt. After the Young Ben

has intervened in this latter incident, Art is led home "like a blind boy" (128), blind because his glasses have been broken and also blind to the values demonstrated by the Young Ben in his defense of the tormented gopher. The fact that Art keeps whimpering, "'I didn't do anything to <u>him</u> [the Young Ben]'" (127) indicates that he has no conception of what his crime has been or of the kind of justice the Young Ben stands for. Only Brian and the Young Ben are deeply concerned with spiritual matters, and even Brian, in his spiritually aware state, does participate in the gopher hunt until the Young Ben puts an end to the sport. Mitchell also tells readers that when Brian is hot and frustrated, he picks up a stone and throws it at a sleeping dog so that it hits the animal "with a thud" (188).

In addition, although Mitchell does seem to respect and find pleasure in the natural world of the prairie, the concept of pantheism, God in nature, can be carried only so far. Certainly not all of nature can be considered good or even just. As Ken Mitchell cautions the reader,

> It would be far too easy to assume that the prairie, as beautiful and idyllic as it seems from Mitchell's description, is equated with "good" or righteousness. Nor is the unnamed town which borders on the prairie neatly symbolic of evil, despite the corruption and mendacity which often seem to pervade it....one must avoid the tendency to see the conflict as one of rural innocence versus urban corruption....Instead of a contrast between town and country...Mitchell intends a parallel.
>
> The comparison is simply this: that there is a balance maintained between positive and negative (good and evil; creation and destruction) both in

the social community and in the natural one.[46] Mitchell suggests that God is manifested in nature, but still the natural world is not enough. There is a need for something more in Brian's life. When his father and mother go to visit the Abercrombies, Brian hears "the wind keening along the eave troughing outside his window," but the wind, as the manifestation of an impersonal Creator, provides no comfort. Brian is "filled with loneliness" (43). Describing the night that Brian runs away from his uncle's farm, Mitchell writes,

> He was filled now with a feeling of nakedness and vulnerability that terrified him. As the wind mounted in intensity, so too the feeling of defenselessness rose in him. It was as though he listened to the drearing wind and in the spread darkness of the prairie night was being drained of his very self. He was trying to hold together something within himself, that the wind demanded and was relentlessly leaching from him. (236)

The wind, in this instance, becomes an instrument of oppression. It contributes to the loneliness Brian feels "in the face of all the frightening emptiness [of the prairie]" (235).

Sometimes, the wind may be, simply, wind, an amoral phenomenon of nature that, during the Depression, worked against the prairie farmers and yet, in doing so, was simply following its natural bent without benefit of human, much less Divine, feeling:

> It [the prairie] lay wide around the town,

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[46]K. Mitchell 36, 39.

> stretching tan to the far line of the sky, shimmering under the June sun and waiting for the unfailing visitation of wind, gentle at first, barely stroking the long grasses and giving them life; later, a long hot gusting that would lift the black topsoil and pile it in barrow pits along the roads, or in deep banks against the fences. (3)

This is also the aspect of the wind pointed out by Digby when he muses, "The Ben had about as much moral conscience as the prairie wind that lifted over the edge of the prairie world to sing mortality to every living thing" (31). There is no evidence that the spiritual values that Mitchell and his characters search for are intrinsically part of the natural world. Those characters who find evidence of God and the sacred in nature are, it would seem, drawing largely on their own imaginations and their desire to find a source of meaning and goodness.

One thing Mitchell does not do in this novel is look for easy answers. Like Margaret Laurence, he does not allow the spiritual search undertaken by his protagonist to focus merely on the beautiful things in the world. From the first pages of the book when Brian goes to see the picture of God who is "'all grapes and bloody'" (7) it is evident that death and its accompanying unpleasantness will play an important part in his search. Ken Mitchell writes that

> what Mitchell has attempted, in his portrayal of young Brian O'Connal's maturation, is to reconcile the conflict between good and "evil" in the universe, to discover an equation for life and death, creation and destruction. It is only through finding a balance for these elements, Mitchell implies, that any human being such as

> Brian O'Connal can "understand" the dilemma of human existence.[47]

Brian's first experience with "the feeling" is a beautiful one:

> A twinkling of light caught his eye; and he turned his head to see that the new, flake leaves of the spirea were starred in the sunshine - on every leaf were drops that had gathered during the night. He got up. They lay limpid, cradled in the curve of the leaves, each with a dark lip of shadow under its curving side and a star's cold light in its pure heart. As he bent more closely over one, he saw the veins of the leaf magnified under the perfect crystal curve of the drop. The barest breath of a wind stirred at his face, and its caress was part of the strange enchantment too. (107)

If the spiritual is to be an important part of life, however, as Brian has long sensed it is, then part of understanding God and His ways must involve an attempt to comprehend the negative as well as the positive. In his questions and discoveries, Brian resembles Rachel, who also had to make an attempt to reconcile the existence of chaos and unpleasantness with the existence of a righteous and omniscient God. When Brian sees the two-headed calf, he again experiences "the feeling," or something very like it:

> This time...the feeling was different from what it had been other times: without the thrill that had attended the discovery of the dewdrop on the spirea leaf; with the thrill of uneasiness that had moved him when he had looked down upon the dead gopher....Brian was not so sure of the feeling this time; it lacked the sharper quality of the other times; he was not so sure, now, that it *was* the feeling....It isn't *right*, thought Brian. (176-77)

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[47]K. Mitchell 26.

The reason that Brian is not sure it is "the feeling" that he has experienced is because what he has felt on seeing the dead calf has, in effect, been the antithesis of "the feeling." He has seen the mystery of blemish and atrocity that draws human beings almost as powerfully as does the mystery of great beauty. Playing a game of marbles, Brian thinks, "'Slips!'" (178), and the word has reference both to the mistake made in the game he is playing and the mistake he feels God has made in creating the two-headed calf. This latter concept may be expanded in the world of the novel to embrace all those who do not fit in, the Ben and the Young Ben, the China Kids, and others. If God is good and wise and all-powerful, as traditional Christianity claims and as Brian has, presumably, been taught, then He cannot make "'slips.'" Thus, there must either be an opposing force of evil in the world that is unrelated to God, or those things that appear as "'slips'" to humans must somehow fit into the plan of a God who has declared,

> "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
> So are My ways higher than your ways,
> And My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa. 55:9)

Mitchell chooses largely to ignore the concept of an opposing force of evil, or a devil, and attempts, instead, to explain the "'slips'" as part of a plan beyond human understanding. To do this, he takes Brian to his Uncle Sean's farm, a place where "'slips'" are common. As noted previously, Ab, fervent Christian though he is, still walks

with a limp and whines his way through life. Annie, the cook, who sings fervently, "'Jesus seves!'" (230), has a very bad cast in her right eye. Noreen, the asthmatic cow, snuffles and heaves her way through existence, and a runt pig nearly meets its fate at Ab's hands. It is in his limited understanding that involves a desire to make all things beautiful that Brian points out to Annie a way in which she can remedy her disfigurement. Her rejection by Ab until her new glasses are broken teaches Brian "that some deviations from [earthly] norms do not necessitate correction in order that human love can be expressed toward them."[48] In a flash of insight as he looks at his runt pig, Brian thinks,

> The world was a funny place. He loved his runt pig that wasn't any good for anything. Ab was fussy about Noreen, the snuffiest cow in the herd, with her wheezing and sneezing and coughing. Before Annie's eyes had been straightened he [Ab] had...[loved her].
>
> Brian knew then. (229)

It is important to note that "the feeling" comes not only when Brian is confronted with beauty, but also in the midst of intense loneliness. The morning after Brian runs away from Sean's farm, "there was an experience of apartness much more vivid than that of the afternoon before - a singing return of the feeling that had possessed him so many times in the past" (237). "The feeling" also comes to Brian in the midst of great sadness. As he stands on the prairie

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[48]New 25.

trying to understand his father's death, Brian suddenly hears a meadow lark sing, and "A sudden breathlessness possessed him; fierce excitement rose in him" (247).

To try to fit all of life into a pattern of beauty would be as confining and misleading as the attempt to fit all of it into the traditional scheme of organized religion. There are those people and incidents that cannot be neatly assimilated into the established norm. If God is to be viewed as omnipotent and thus in control of the whole universe, the concept of Him must be expanded from the traditional ideas of an old man with a long beard or a shepherd surrounded by lambs to include the aspects of strangeness inherent in Brian's spider Gods and the mysterious attributes of the all-pervasive prairie wind. As well as including the heaven where "'there's sunshine, and it's blue'" (23) conceived of by the four-year-old Brian, the concept must also include the "clouds' slow shadows" that "melt across the prairie's face" and the "nights" [that] "slip darkness over" (300). W. O. Mitchell has said,

> ...for years I thought of myself as a Platonist with Presbyterian overtones....I've come to realize that in fact I am an Existentialist as an artist and a person. And that Existentialism is a falling/balancing act with no absolutes. And so what you're faced with in life, or illusions of life, is balancing - there's no either/or. There are no total victories; there are no total defeats. You end up accepting that life involves dilemma, contradiction, and no absolutes or simplicities.[49]

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[49] O'Rourke 153.

Only by learning to reconcile the less pleasant parts of existence with his belief in God is Brian able to cope with those crises of faith that do occur in his life. The four-year-old boy who believes he can make wings that will carry him to heaven must combat the interference of the "six-year-old cynic" (28), Artie Sherry, who maintains, "'No, you ain't [going to heaven]. Not with string and feathers'" (29). Mitchell writes that in spite of his spirited defense of the project, "Brian, staring down at the pitifully few feathers they [he and Forbsie] had tied, knew that Arthur was perfectly right" (29).

Brian's faith is again tried when, the Hoffmans'problem with procreating rabbits having led to Brian's questions about rabbit birth, his grandmother tells him, "'Wherever ye find anything worth a whoop, ye'll find the Lord's got a hand in it....He does - He always did - He always will'" (170). Brian's reaction to her statement is simply, "'God isn't very considerate - is He, Gramma?'" (170). Brian is beginning to acknowledge that God's ways may seem strange, and even wrong, when judged in accordance with human understanding. The information Art gives Brian about babies is the ultimate test of the boy's faith. Having heard his first real information about sex, Brian feels that he will

> never know [the answer he is looking for] now ....It had slipped completely and forever through his fingers, the thing that was hidden like a hazed sun; it had got away for good and never again would the feeling well up in him like water slowly rising in a hole dug near the bank of a

> river. Art had spoiled it. He had spoiled it!
> And he did not want to know. He wanted never to know. Nothing was any good. The feeling had nothing to do with anything. It wasn't any good! (206)

Brian's crises of faith and his need to incorporate the unexplainable into his understanding of God and His ways are echoes of the process, also evident in As For Me and My House, that must have been going on in the minds of most of those who had to survive the dust bowl conditions on the prairies. Several times throughout the novel Mitchell makes reference to the farmers' blighted hopes. In part one of Who Has Seen the Wind, he writes that Sean's wheat is "brown and wilted" and his crop "soaked with moisture that had come too late to do it any good" (57). In part two, he notes that the farmers are "burning with the hope that this would not be another dry year" (103). Sean, however, tells the O'Connals, "'An' there will be no wheat this year again! Baked hotter than the breath offa hell itself! If it isn't that, then it'll be the hail to knock the heads down - '" (115). Later, Mitchell writes, "Fall brought another crop failure to the district" (171). In part three, he notes, "It was another dry year with crops brown before their time, dust black against the sun sometimes for a week on end" (185). It is not only Brian who must seek to resolve seemingly meaningless suffering with a belief in a good and benevolent God. It seems that one must accept the fact that some aspects of God's ways and His will must remain forever

a mystery.

In view of all the questions about Christianity, its adherents, and its Deity that are raised in this novel, one may ask where within the text Mitchell intends his readers to look for a statement of what he believes to be "the vital things" (191). The answer, it would seem, is that Mitchell has given the views of religion and life that he feels are valid to a number of characters who live in opposition to the injustice and prejudice that are so evident in the actions of people like Mr. Powelly and Mrs. Abercrombie. D. G. Jones writes,

> The wind bloweth where it listeth and the authentic life of the spirit, as of the body, cannot be entirely suppressed. However, its representatives are, for the most part, outcasts from the established community and the official culture. From the point of view of the minister or the wife of the banker, they are delinquents, criminals, buffoons, or madmen....They are all wise fools....Both their words and their example are more convincing than those of the established pillars of the society.[50]

Following the same line of thought adopted by Sinclair Ross in As For Me and My House and Margaret Laurence in A Jest of God, Mitchell makes the characters in this novel who best exemplify Christian values those who have not, it seems, been unduly influenced by traditional concepts of religion and who are not actively involved with organized churches. As shown by the values that she holds dear and wants to instill in her sons, Maggie O'Connal is one of

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[50]Jones 37-38.

these characters:

> She had plans for her sons; she wanted them to be as neat as a stooked field, as sweet as a loft of hay, but above all - mature....Dear God, she wished fiercely, make them turn out all right - not just all right: world beaters - the best there was....Like their father - that would be enough. (78, 101)

Maggie is a churchgoer, but not, it would seem, an overly ardent one since, as formerly pointed out, Brian knows nothing about the church at all until after he is four years old. Sunday is a special day in the O'Connal home, readers are told when Brian is six, and the family does attend church together, but Maggie is not involved in the choir or, as far as readers know, in any other aspect of the church functions. She is not a victim of the narrow-minded corruption of Christianity that binds the people at Knox Presbyterian. When Mrs. Abercrombie asks Maggie her opinion of the controversial C.G.I.T. service, Maggie responds, "'Why - I thought it a lovely service'" (45).

Brian's father is another of these worthy characters. He is a kind man, filled with love for his children. He neither condemns nor destroys Brian's childish and unorthodox conception of God. Rather, he gently turns Brian's mind to other subjects, specifically a new pup, supposedly until Brian is better able to deal with complex spiritual ideas. Unlike Mr. Powelly, Gerald O'Connal is not a student of Scripture. When Brian asks if God sleeps, his father stumbles over the subject saying, "'I - He - I don't think

so'" (100). He does not immediately call to mind the words of the Psalmist:

> He who keeps you will not slumber.
> Behold, He who keeps Israel
> Shall neither slumber nor sleep. (Ps. 121:3)

Gerald O'Connal does, however, practise the principles of the Gospels simply as a matter of course. When Brian decides he will omit Artie from his bedtime prayer, presumably because of some childish disagreement, his father counsels him, "'Better stick Artie back in'" (39). Gerald is teaching his son to "'love [his] enemies, bless those who curse [him], do good to those who hate [him], and pray for those who spitefully use [him] and persecute [him]'" (Matt. 5:44). Perhaps he cannot quote Christ's exact words as they are recorded in Scripture, but the spirit of the New Testament teachings is certainly there in Gerald's gentle injunction. Scriptural principles are again illustrated by Brian's father when he makes "taking a tray up to his [Brian's] mother" "part of Sunday" (108). With this act, Gerald shows Brian that Christianity is not merely comprised of church attendance and cold conventions. Love and service to others are also important. Watching this man deal wisely with his son and remembering that Brian sees in his father those characteristics he would like God to have, readers may be inclined to believe Brian's statement made to Mrs. Hislop: "'My dad is a druggist. He works for God, I guess'" (9). Gerald O'Connal may fall asleep in church,

but, perhaps precisely because he does this and is not influenced by Reverend Powelly's message of hatred, he exhibits the qualities of fairmindedness and compassion called for in the Scriptures.

Brian's mother and father stand almost alone as examples of admirable characters in this novel who continue to attend church.[51] Digby, the school principal, is another of the commendable persons presented by Mitchell, and he is chastised by the members of the school board for never going to services and hence setting a bad example for his charges. He is told,

> "The - kids aren't educated just inside the schoolroom. We feel that their spiritual life - you should be taking more interest in the church, and we figure it wouldn't hurt if you was to take a Sunday school class each Sunday." (284)

Digby, however, carries on his own spiritual search through his reading of the works of various philosophers that Mrs. Abercrombie and those like her would never have time for in their busy round of church activities. He reveals a knowledge of the Bible as well as a respect for it when he says that he will bring Milt Palmer a Bible so that Palmer can read Ecclesiastes, a book that Digby feels will help him answer his questions about life, thought, and reality.

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[51]As previously pointed out, Reverend Hislop seems to be one of the praiseworthy characters who try to put Christ's teachings about love and service into practice. Because, however, he lacks the strength to stand up for his convictions in the face of criticism, he is of limited use as an example of a man who incorporates Gospel-based Christianity into his life.

Digby is a perceptive and thoughtful man who is unwilling to accept the town's easy judgements of right and wrong. When he visits Mrs. Ben to ask her to do something about the Young Ben's truancy, the woman will not promise to get her son to school. Unwilling to give her word with respect to a situation over which she has no control, she will only say, "'I'll start him out'" (84). Rather than harboring an opinion of Mrs. Ben based on her social status, Digby "admired the woman for her honesty that would not let her promise more" (84). Truth and morality are important to Digby, and because he is basically free of preconceived ideas about those around him, he is able to recognize these qualities even when they occur in unlikely places.

Digby has a wisdom that many conventional Christians in the novel lack. He has, for example, insight into his charges that someone like Mrs. Abercrombie could never obtain. Brian, on his way to God's house, meets Digby and tells him, "'We're going to see Somebody...God'" (7). The schoolmaster responds seriously, "'I'd like to come with you, but I have a previous engagement'" (7). Digby, like Gerald O'Connal, wisely avoids discouraging or crushing the childish faith with which Brian presents him.

Digby is also genuinely concerned about what he is teaching the pupils in his school. He is unwilling merely to offer them platitudes and meaningless phrases. When Brian is sent to Digby after shooting Miss MacDonald with a

water pistol, the principal begins to give the boy standardized advice but then stops in mid-sentence, realizing what he is saying:

> "You want to get along with people. You want to grow up to be..." An individual whose every emotion, wish, action, was the resultant of two forces: what he felt and truly wanted, what he thought he should feel and ought to want. Give him the faiths that belonged to all other men. (73)

Dismissing platitudes and pat answers, Digby, again like Brian's father, looks for a subject that will have real meaning for a small boy and communicates with Brian by talking about the boy's dog.

Digby quietly attempts to help Brian in his spiritual quest. He takes time to share the principles of Berkeley's theory of God with the boy. Although Brian is not yet ready to understand this theory, Digby has opened up a new train of thought for him, one that may, in fact, lead him closer to at least some of the answers he has been seeking. Digby tries to give Brian some clues about his spiritual search, telling him that there is "'a feeling'" and that he believes Brian is "'on the right track'" (294). By agreeing that "'A person can do it [grasp answers to spiritual questions] by feeling'" (294), Digby seems to ally himself with those who would affirm the value of spiritual intuition as opposed to mere fact and staid tradition. By answering Brian's questions as he does, Digby implies that he, personally, has experienced a quest similar to the boy's and has resolved

his own questions in some way. The answers at which Digby has arrived may account for the fact that his brand of spirituality differs from that of many of the other adults in the novel.

In addition to dealing gently and wisely with Brian, Digby argues that the Young Ben should be released from the confines of school that are little less than a torture to this boy of the prairie. His act of paying for the gun and shells stolen by the Young Ben further demonstrates Digby's understanding of and compassion toward the boy. Digby realizes that the Young Ben is not dangerous, just a wild thing who cannot be bound by the dictates of society. Digby also demonstrates concern for the China Kids. He assures Miss Thompson that "he would do his best" to "get some action" on the matter of the children, and he also "insisted upon sharing half the Wong grocery bill with her" (146). Digby's concern for the children in his school is manifested both in words and, more importantly, in acts of generosity and love.

Miss Thompson is another of the characters in the novel who exemplify the values Mitchell seems to want his readers to see as preferable to those practised in the organized Church. She comes into the school to replace Miss MacDonald and her brand of religious legalism. Like Digby, she is never depicted as attending any specific church. Also like Digby, Miss Thompson treats the children in her charge with

understanding. Her students do "not have to stand up by their seats to recite" (140). Miss Thompson immediately abolishes this traditional symbol of the power of the adult over the child. Mitchell writes that she has a "respect for individuality," which a number of the closed-minded townsfolk consider "weakness" (140), and that "Except toward the China Kids, she showed no favoritism" (140). Miss Thompson practises the principle of equality in the classroom, and yet she is warm-hearted toward those who are in genuine need of her attention. She accepts the China Kids, Tang and Vooie, as valuable members of her class. She sends them to Dr. Svarich to have their health checked, and she goes to Tang's birthday party with a gift and a card in an effort to lessen the devastating effect of Mariel Abercrombie's campaign to have the party boycotted by all the girls in the school.

Mitchell writes of "Miss Thompson's active sense of justice and her understanding" (147) and notes that the Young Ben also benefits from these qualities: "She changed his seat to a back one among the Grade Four students" (147), where he looks a little less out of place than among the Grade Twos. "In a tacit understanding with Digby...[she made] no official mention of the Young Ben's truancy" (147), and "She sought to ease the boy's tension by assigning him numerous tasks" (147). Miss Thompson does not want merely to force the Young Ben into a system in which he is uncom-

fortable and where he does not belong. She is more concerned that the Young Ben should be released to fulfill his potential in whatever way is natural for him.

When Miss Thompson talks to Peter Svarich about the China Kids after he has examined them, Svarich says, "'They're suffering from malnutrition....What the hell do you care?'" Miss Thompson answers, "'I care....They're my children....They are Chinese, and they are my children ....They would be mine...if they were Ukrainian'" (143). Miss Thompson's genuine freedom from race prejudice forms a welcome contrast to the delight taken by Mariel Abercrombie and her friends in racially derogatory riddles:

> "I know a riddle!" cried Mariel...."An' another: She's in Grade Four - she has black hair that isn't curly - it is straight and it is stringy and kind of greasy! She is yellow and has slanty eyes!"
>
> "Tang!" (157-58)

Walking down the street, Miss Thompson nods to everyone she meets "with a quiet friendliness...and showed no distinction between parent, child, and town drunk" (161). That Miss Thompson's cottage is "on the <u>wrong</u> side of town" (134) is symbolic of the fact that she attempts to break down the barriers of race and social standing. She tries to be an agent of harmony and to bring the various factions in the town together.

Miss Thompson is a woman of action. Her vigorous attempts to get something done for the China Kids contrast sharply with the solution to the problem chosen by Judge

Mortimer and his town council. In reply to Miss Thompson's question, "'What has the council done about those - about seeing that those children get food?'" Judge Mortimer responds "heartily,"

> "We're considerin' the matter. We're considerin' it....We sort of figgered to leave her at the status of quo - we figgered to leave her there. They're Chinee an' them folks got their own way to take care of the indigiment. They got tongs, ain't they?" (145-46)

When Miss Thompson and Digby go to pay the bill at Blaine's Store for food supplied to the Chinese family, they find it has already been "taken care of" (146) by Peter Svarich. Although he plays a relatively minor part in the novel, the doctor is another of the characters who represent worthwhile values.

Mitchell writes, "It was that fall...that Digby and Miss Thompson and Peter Svarich finally got action on the China Kids" (171). Unfortunately, the action is dictated by the town's careless cruelty. It is decided to "put the Chinese family on relief - a temporary measure until arrangements were completed for sending the children away" (171) to separate homes, a plan that results in the suicide of Old Wong. Still, although the final result of their efforts is tragic, Digby, Miss Thompson, and Dr. Svarich do attempt to act in accordance with Christ's words: "'And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold <u>water</u> in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward'" (Matt. 10:42).

Brian's Uncle Sean is yet another of the worthy characters depicted in Who Has Seen the Wind. He is a man who fights adamantly, courageously, and intelligently, if fruitlessly, for the causes in which he believes:

> In the course of the drought years Sean had changed from a bewildered man, watching dry winds lick up the topsoil from his land, to a man with a message. He was the keeper of the Lord's Vineyard, literally. (18)

With the word "literally" Mitchell implies that as opposed to Saint Sammy, who believes he has his designation as "Jehovah's Hired Man" mystically given to him, it is really Sean, the man with practical ideas for the soil's salvation and renewal, who is the keeper of the land. O. S. Mitchell says of Sean that he is

> the true prairie prophet, the real hired man of the Lord....It is Uncle Sean's imaginative but practical schemes of "farming with hearts an' brains" that will eventually be fulfilled. His ideas to irrigate, to mix farm and cover crop will actually bear fruit and turn the desert prairie into a garden.[52]

In spirit, if not in actual word, Sean does sound like an impassioned preacher of the Gospel when he gives Gerald O'Connal "one of his evangelistic denunciations" (18) against the farmers who are using improper farming methods and leaving their land for long periods of time, thus intensifying the effects of the drought:

> "Jist look at her - creased an' pocked an' cracked - no grass to hold the topsoil down! That's what happens when you crop her out an' away

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[52]O. S. Mitchell 28-29.

> fer the winter - then back agin in the spring to scratch at her agin - on agin off agin an' away agin! You wanta travel an' so does she! I seen her travelin' on a first-class ticket by air - she's bin to the Coast with you - a thousand million sections of her - black cloudsa dust blacker than all yer greedy souls - lifted up an' travelin' - travelin' clear to Jesus!" (18-19)

The fervency of a Gospel evangelist is, or should be, evidence that he or she is utterly devoted to God, and the fervency with which Sean speaks proves that he is totally devoted to the land. Like many who enter the Gospel tents to hear the speaker's powerful message, Brian is "half-dazed and hypnotized by the spell of his uncle's words" (19). He is, in fact, converted by Sean to the idea of being a "'dirt doctor'" (295) in an effort to save the prairie.

Sean is a kind man, as proven by Gerald O'Connal's musings about the money Sean once lent him. Maggie notes that Sean demonstrates "the same easygoing generosity that was his brother's" (110). In fact, in their desire to help each other in times of crisis, Sean and Gerald both embody the apostle Peter's injunction to "add to your faith... brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Pet. 1:5, 7). Sean expresses concern and a desire to help when Bobbie is ill. He is there to offer his brother comfort and assurance during this time. In his rough way, he holds out the only consolation he can, asking Gerald if he would like "'One hell of a good toot'" (18). He assures his brother, "'He'll be all right. Isn't going to do any good to get yer britchin' all tangled up. He'll be all

right'" (18). Sean is willing to help the O'Connal family by taking Brian to his farm when Gerald is ill, and when Maggie's mother dies, Sean is again on hand to help: "It was Sean who handled the funeral details and arrangements for Maggie. He came into town in a cutter, and stayed at the house for a week" (295).

The Young Ben is also a character who exhibits the values Mitchell stresses as being important. Discussing the Bens with Reverend Hislop, however, Digby comments, "'No volunteer values in the Bens....Looks as though that seed [the conventional Christian teachings] fell on stony ground'" (31). Mitchell writes that as the Young Ben sits in the pew the morning his father is received into fellowship at Knox Presbyterian Church, his "gray eyes in his still face slid first to one side, then to the other: wary eyes, seeking out and measuring the people who hemmed him in" (112). The Young Ben feels uneasy and out of place inside this manmade institution.

It is, though, the young Ben who, as previously noted, presents the town boys with the idea of basic humanity when he gives the gopher that Art is torturing a quick and merciful death. Laurence Ricou points out "the Young Ben's natural and uncomplicated reverence for life and justice."[53] Mitchell writes that after the Young Ben's intrusion into the boys' gopher hunt, Brian "was filled with

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[53]Ricou 102.

a sense of the justness, the rightness, the completeness of what the Young Ben had done - what he himself would like to have done" (127-28). The Young Ben's anger against Art is a righteous anger against the oppressor who torments his victim unmercifully. It is the same kind of anger Jesus displayed against the merchants and moneychangers who were, in effect, robbing the Jews in the temple and its environs.

It is also the Young Ben's sense of justice that causes him to take Brian's part when the latter is punished too harshly by Miss MacDonald. As the teacher "stepped carefully around Brian" while he stands with his hands outstretched, "the look of puzzlement in the Young Ben's face gave way to resentment" (92). It is the oppression of the child by the stronger adult, not Brian's lie, that is seen as wrong by the boy from the prairie. Miss MacDonald's resignation, Mitchell implies, may very well be a result of "the look in the Young Ben's eyes as she faced him in the aisle the day that Brian fainted" (104).

It is as if to show Brian that there is gentleness as well as vengeance in the world that the Young Ben puts his arm around Brian as the latter walks home from school, "still faint and weak" (94). Like a protecting angel, the Young Ben "walked the rest of the way to Brian's house with him" (94). The prairie boy waits outside the house like some benevolent spirit during Brian's illness. Gerald O'Connal comments, "'I've seen the Young Ben around the

front of the house a couple of times....What's he up to, do you suppose?'" (99). Out of a knowledge born of the unspoken bond between himself and the Young Ben, Brian tells his father, "'He wants to know am I all right'" (99).

The bond Brian feels with the Young Ben the first time the two meet continues even after Brian turns eleven:

> It was almost as if his [Brian's] father's death had brought the two closer together, for after that event Brian began to visit the Young Ben and to walk with him over the prairie or along the town streets whenever the Young Ben delivered washing. It was a taciturn association, almost a communication by silences....He [Brian] was the only child in the school who spoke to the Young Ben or to whom the Young Ben spoke. (253)

As Brian matures and learns more about life, his association with the Young Ben becomes an open one. Together, he and the Young Ben, like the other admirable characters in this novel, work to break down the artificial barriers erected by the townspeople.

William New draws attention to the "reflector patterns [of Brian's development] in the subplots"[54] of Who Has Seen the Wind. As Brian matures, he takes the same path toward adopting the values of human compassion and understanding that these praiseworthy characters have evidently taken before him, and he puts into practice many of the lessons these characters have taught him. He develops, for instance, new appreciation for and understanding of the members of his family. The day that Gerald O'Connal becomes

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[54]New 27.

seriously ill, Brian shows a greater degree of consideration than usual for his mother: "As they walked down the stairs together, he slid his arm around her waist. She laid hers over his shoulder" (210). As Brian stands on the prairie after his father's death, trying to come to terms with his own feelings, his thoughts turn to his mother:

> And as the boy stood with the prairie stretching from him, he knew that things were different now - forever and forever - forever the dark well of his mother's loneliness, forever the silence that could never end.
>
> His mother! The thought of her filled him with tenderness and yearning. She needed him now. He could feel them [the tears] sliding slowly down his cheek; he could taste the salt of them at the corners of his mouth.
>
> ...
>
> He turned and started for home, where his mother was. (247)

William New writes,

> Tears of relief come only when he [Brian] realizes responsibility for others and a direction to take during his own life....Brian's "growing sense of responsibility" accompanies the growth of...awareness; expressed towards all around him, it is a manifestation of his increasingly competent and humanistic attempts to rectify the unjust and the improperly controlled in that part of his environment over which he has influence.[55]

Of Brian's relationship with the members of his family after he turns eleven Mitchell says:

> There was a new and warmer relationship with his mother now that he turned to her for some of the comradeship he had formerly shared with his father....And there was in Brian a growing consideration for the other members of the family; he taught Bobbie to skate and to swim; he insisted that his brother be allowed to play ball in the

[55] New 28-29.

> informal games the boys got together, even though it was only as fielder. It seemed too that as he got older his grandmother had come to meet him spiritually in her declining years.... (251)

Like Hector and Calla in A Jest of God, most of the characters Mitchell designates as worthy of respect seem to have no concern about the standards of behaviour traditionally dictated by the adherents of Protestant Christianity. The restrictions regarding propriety that bind the Bentleys and their Horizon neighbours and the middle-class residents of Manawaka do not trouble these individuals. As if to support the ideas put forward in the interview done for Quill & Quire, "'I'm not dogmatically or ritualistically religious....But I think I'm an honourable man,'"[56] W. O. Mitchell endows these characters with a number of traits commonly thought by conventional Christians to be trademarks of the sinner. Consequently, Gerald O'Connal considers lying to Sean so that he can give his brother the money he needs: "Perhaps he could tell Sean there was still a couple of hundred owing - that would finance the irrigation project he had his heart set on for next spring" (102). In his attempt to help Brian adjust to school and his teacher, Digby also resorts to lying. He tells Brian that Miss MacDonald would like him to have the offending water pistol back "knowing that it was the farthest thing from Miss MacDonald's desires" (75). These are well-intentioned lies,

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[56]W. O. Mitchell, Quill & Quire 6.

but lies nonetheless.

Several times Mitchell points out that Miss Thompson smokes, a rather risqué habit for a woman of the Depression years. In fact, Digby, Svarich, and Miss Thompson all smoke. Digby, however, smokes a pipe, and Svarich smokes cigarettes. Only Miss Thompson rolls her own. Stepping outside the dictates for ladylike behaviour in the town, she tells Digby that she "'can also drive a binder, and break a horse'" (146). Dr. Svarich adds to his "sins" by establishing himself as one of the bootlegging Ben's "regular customers" (148).

In a similar fashion, the Young Ben, whose ideas of right and wrong have been formed by his life on the prairie, remains untroubled by the conventions and moral boundaries of the town. He comes to school only when it suits his purposes to do so, and when he wants a gun and ammunition, he merely takes them without the formality of cash or bill of sale.

Brian's Uncle Sean is perhaps the best example of a character who refuses to conform to conventional standards of Christian behaviour and yet often acts in accordance with the principles taught by Christ. Sean, as already pointed out, is kind and generous when his brother is in need. His language, however, is so black that Maggie O'Connal tells her husband, "'Sean - the way he - his language!...It isn't right for the boys'" (121). On the way to his farm with

Brian, Sean curses anything he can think of, the government, the drought, the weeds, the car with its flat tire, the jack, the wrench, the distance to the farm, the car's brakes, the loop on the gatepost, the barb on the post, and his dog. "When he had come to a stop in front of the house," Mitchell writes, "he sat for a few moments and cursed intransitively" (220). Mitchell gives the following description of Sean: "If ever a man cursed, or smoked, or drank, it was Sean O'Connal; an oath, a pipe, or the rawness of liquor was constantly in his mouth" (116). Sean does not attend church, as is evident when Brian's family returns from the morning service to find Sean waiting at home to share Sunday dinner with them. Still, readers may find Sean a more attractive character than Mr. Abercrombie, the banker and conscientious churchgoer. The latter refuses to loan Sean money to carry out his well-planned irrigation scheme telling Brian's uncle, "'I fail to see just how it would increase your income, so that you'd be able to [pay all Sean owes to the bank]'" (81). Sean may also be considered a great deal more engaging than the whining, self-righteous Ab who destroys Sean's pipes and tobacco and puts drugs in his tea to stop him from drinking alcohol.

The vices displayed by the characters mentioned here do not seem to interfere with their sense of values, whereas those who are free from traditional vices have great difficulty putting into practice the principles of Scripture.

The fact that the characters in this novel who are truly acting in accordance with Scriptural precepts drink, smoke, and do not regularly attend church seems to be part of Mitchell's attempt to point out the uselessness of the established and traditional norms of Christian behaviour.

This idea is expressed again in the way Mitchell deals with words. By making Sean a warm and intelligent character, he tries to show readers that the use of foul language does not necessarily make a person morally bad. Mitchell attempts to illustrate the false importance those who profess to be Christians have attached to language and to show, also, that there is no evil in words themselves. Words have simply been endowed with power, good or bad, by the people who use them.

When the four-year-old Brian sits down to dinner one night, he makes the statement, "'Carrots are bloody'" (35). Immediately thinking of the word in the traditional slang sense in which it refers, at least originally, to the bloody wounds of Christ, Brian's father asks, "'Where did you pick that up?'" (35). Brian, however, gives a very logical reason for his use of the term. "'Beets bleed. Carrots got blood - they're colored too'" (35). The adult interpretation of the adjective has no place in Brian's childish understanding. Brian's father, however, cautions the child not to use the word because "'It isn't nice'" (35). In answer to Brian's query about this qualification, Gerald

O'Connal can only say lamely, "'It just isn't'" (35).

A similar instance occurs when Forbsie says of Brian's puppy, "'He's the jeezliest thing'" (40). Readers may be somewhat taken aback by this language in the mouth of a four-year-old. In response to Brian's request for a definition of the word, however, Forbsie answers, "'I dunno....I just made it up'" (40). Again, the "bad" word loses all its potency when the child using it confesses to having no understanding that "'jeezliest'" may be seen as a corruption of the name "Jesus" and thus constitutes profanity.

When, during a Sunday visit from his Uncle Sean, Bobbie uses the word "goddam" (116), much to his parents' chagrin, Brian wishes "that he had been the one to say it" (117). Given the fact that this incident occurs on the same day Brian has had his first deeply spiritual experience with "the feeling," there is surely no disrespect toward God intended by Brian in this wish. He merely looks on the word as a mark of adulthood and a dramatic device for getting attention.

Mitchell also makes an ironic comment on the language of Christianity that is glibly used until it loses its original impact and has virtually no meaning. The word "saved," for instance, is, in the New Testament, a dynamic word that refers to Christ's blood sacrifice by which He interposed Himself between the sinner and the wrath of God. It describes the state of a person who has, through the

Divine mystery by which Christ's suffering and death provide vicarious atonement for sin, avoided the torments of hell and separation from God and has instead been prepared to enter into the glories of eternal life.[57] In his confused state, however, Sammy believes that the importance of the word "saved" is related to the collecting of underwear labels and matchboxes. Thus, he tells Brian and his friends,

> "I saved them - labels an' matchboxes - saved the saved matchboxes - saved the saved labels - the dropsa rain an' the daysa eternity - saved, an' it come to pass that all was saved! Sammy saved them all!" (195)

Readers are left to ponder the validity of traditional "religious" language that can be interpreted in such a way by the simple-minded or, perhaps, by those who are unfamiliar with expressions commonly used within the Christian community.

Another instance of misinterpretation occurs when Mitchell points out that Bent Candy intends to quote Luke 23:34 at his deacons' meeting. The verse reads, "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' And they divided His garments and cast lots."

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[57]Probably the best known reference to Christ's intercession for sinful humanity is found in John 3:16-17:

> "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
> "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

This verse contains Jesus' words from the cross signifying His forgiveness of those who have put Him to death. These words are vital to the Christian faith since they set a precedent for Christian forgiveness. Candy, however, plans to use them to refer merely to the minister's use of a varying translation of the Bible. Clearly Candy, like so many of the other Christians in this book, has lost all sense of proportion where his religion is concerned. Like Sammy when he uses the word "saved," Candy has attributed his own meaning to these frequently quoted words. In Candy's case, however, the misinterpretation is deliberate. His is a meaning that will suit his own purposes, provided he can convince the rest of the deacons to accept this perversion of Scripture.

Mitchell makes it clear that he is not in favour of the false restrictions and limitations that bind the nominally Christian community in Who Has Seen the Wind. At the end of the novel, when Mrs. Abercrombie resigns from the school board, the other members, having gladly accepted her resignation, begin to demonstrate a spirit of freedom and tolerance previously missing from the town. This is illustrated in the vote of confidence for Digby and Miss Thompson urged by Mr. Johnson and agreed to by Mr. Thorburn. Mrs. Abercrombie serves as a symbol of the bonds that can be imposed through the darkness of ignorance and staid adherence to traditional "Christian" concepts and values. Miss

Thompson asks the board members, "'Isn't it about time for a little sweetness and light around here?'" (287). It is only after Mrs. Abercrombie's resignation is accepted that the "light" of which Christ spoke when he commanded His followers to "'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven'" (Matt. 5:16) can become a part of the school board's transactions.

It could be argued that the code of values and morals that Mitchell seems to embrace in Who Has Seen the Wind is so basic that it may, in fact, have little connection with the Bible and the message presented there. That would, however, be disregarding the evidence set out by Mitchell himself. The main protagonist in this book is on a quest for spiritual understanding that takes on increasing depth throughout the novel, and at least three other characters, Hislop, Digby, and Milt Palmer, continue to try to untangle spiritual truth. As Laurence did in A Jest of God, Mitchell openly draws readers' attention toward the Scriptures. In his preface, he mentions the Bible and the interpretation of the wind contained in it. Digby makes open reference to the Bible, specifically to Ecclesiastes, as the book he feels may hold some answers to Milt Palmer's questions. As she nears the end of her life, Brian's grandmother looks to her mother's Bible as a timeless source of strength. She also

refers to Ecclesiastes and quotes the words, "'...when the sound of the grinding is low....Or ever the silver cord be loosed,...or the golden bowl be broken....Shall the dust return...'" (246, cf. Eccles. 12:4, 6, 7). Mitchell also quotes directly from the New Testament when describing Mr. Powelly's composition of his sermons. When referring to the text Bent Candy will use at his deacons' meeting, Mitchell merely gives a Scriptural reference, "Luke, XXIII:34" (213), thus encouraging readers to go directly to the Bible in order to understand the significance of what Candy will say. All this evidence would seem to indicate that Mitchell was conscious of spiritual concerns, particularly the teachings of the Bible, as he wrote this novel.

Close investigation reveals, in fact, that the references by Digby and Mrs. MacMurray to Ecclesiastes give some clue to the thematic structure of Who Has Seen the Wind. The quest for wisdom and understanding engaged in by Brian, Hislop, Digby, and Milt Palmer resembles the search undertaken by Solomon, the author of the biblical book:

> And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this grievous task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. (Eccles. 1:13-14)

The idea that everything in this world "is vanity and grasping for the wind" is repeated over and over again throughout Ecclesiastes and seems at least one likely source for

Mitchell's title and his association of Brian's quest for knowledge with the prairie wind in all its aspects.

Solomon states,

> To everything there is a season,
> A time for every purpose under heaven:
> A time to be born,
> And a time to die;
> A time to plant,
> And a time to pluck what is planted....
> (Eccles. 3:1-2)

The knowledge Brian gains as he searches for understanding of his world seems in some ways to reflect the conclusion reached by Solomon in these verses. Brian encounters birth and death in a number of forms and learns about the prairie, resolving to help it grow fertile again. This passage finds another echo in Mitchell's preface. There he writes of "the ultimate meaning of the cycle of life" and "the realities of birth, hunger, satiety, eternity, death."[58]

Other themes in the book of Ecclesiastes also play an important part in Who Has Seen the Wind. Solomon notes that the fool and the wise man, the sinner and the righteous man live side by side, and readers of Mitchell's novel are likely to think of Mr. Powelly and Digby, Bent Candy and Saint Sammy, Mrs. Abercrombie and Miss Thompson. Solomon writes that "One event happens to the righteous and the wicked" (Eccles. 9:2). These words may cause those who have read Mitchell's book to remember the wind that touches the lives of everyone in and around the town. Solomon predicts,

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[58]W. O. Mitchell, preface n.p.

however, "...it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God (Eccles. 8:13). The truth of this verse is evident in Bent Candy - his hypocritical role in the Baptist Church and his experience with Divine retribution.

The fourth chapter of Ecclesiastes deals with oppression and the evil that it occasions:

> Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun:
> And look! The tears of the oppressed,
> But they have no comforter -
> On the side of their oppressors there was power,
> But they have no comforter. (Eccles. 4:1)

Justice, or the apparent lack of it, is an important theme of this biblical book. Solomon states, "If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter" (Eccles. 5:8). These actions are reflected in Mrs. Abercrombie's oppression of Reverend Hislop and her domination of the town, in Mariel's oppression of the China Kids, in Mr. Powelly's campaign against the Young Ben, in Miss MacDonald's severe punishment of Brian, and in Art's cruel sport with the gopher.

Ecclesiastes also deals with what the Prophecy Edition of the New King James Bible labels the "Insufficiencies of Human Religion,"[59] and this subject certainly plays a major

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[59]The Holy Bible, New King James Version, prophecy ed. (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1985) 661.

part in Who Has Seen the Wind. Solomon writes,

> Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.
>
> Do not be rash with your mouth,
> And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.
> For God is in heaven, and you on earth;
> Therefore let your words be few.
> (Eccles. 5:1-2)

Mr. Powelly's well-constructed sermons that have no love or Scriptural principles behind them, Mrs. Abercrombie's singing when she neither believes in nor practises the truth she is singing about, and the latter's letter about the C.G.I.T. service are all instances of speaking rashly and profusely in the presence of the Lord instead of allowing worship to come from the heart.

In the final chapter of Ecclesiastes, Solomon advises,

> Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
> Before the difficult days come,
> And the years draw near when you say,
> "I have no pleasure in them...." (Eccles. 12:1)

Perhaps it is this thought as much as his apparent fascination with Plato's theory of childhood perfection that has caused Mitchell to choose a child protagonist. When the novel begins, Brian is four years old; when it ends, he is eleven and on the threshold of adolescence. Thus, Brian "remembers" God and pursues his search for Him throughout his childhood. The years of adulthood may be considered to be the "difficult days" when the newness of life is over and the happy expectancy of childhood is gone.

The final page of the novel echoes closely verses 4 through 6 of the first chapter of Ecclesiastes. Solomon writes,

> _One_ generation passes away, and _another_ generation comes;
> But the earth abides forever.
> The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,
> And hastens to the place where it arose.
> The wind goes toward the south,
> And turns around to the north;
> The wind whirls about continually,
> And comes again on its circuit.

Mitchell's text reads,

> As clouds' slow shadows melt across the prairie's face, more nights slip darkness over. Light then dark, then light again. Day then night, then day again. A meadow lark sings and it is spring. And summer comes.
>
> A year is done.
>
> Another comes and it is done.
>
> Where spindling poplars lift their dusty leaves and wild sunflowers stare, the gravestones stand among the prairie grasses. Over them a rapt and endless silence lies. This soil is rich....
>
> The wind turns in silent frenzy upon itself, whirling into a smoking funnel, breathing up topsoil and tumbleweed skeletons to carry them on its spinning way over the prairie, out and out to the far line of the sky. (300)

By ending his novel with words similar to those used at the beginning of Ecclesiastes, the biblical book of questions, Mitchell confirms his statement, made in an interview with Patricia Barclay, that when he wrote _Who Has Seen the Wind_ he "didn't have an answer. It was just a question."[60]

Laurence Ricou writes, "Man's search for the meaning of

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[60]Patricia Barclay, "Regionalism and the Writer: A Talk with W. O. Mitchell," _Canadian Literature_ 14 (Autumn 1962): 55.

his existence, occasionally despairing, often whimsical, always important, is central in Mitchell's imagination."[61] Ricou also says that in Who Has Seen the Wind

> The questioning itself...is more important than the answer. Brian himself must sense the necessity of questioning - he certainly seems less frustrated at the novel's conclusion....[62]

Brian is still searching for answers, however, and still believing that he will find them. He concludes,

> It had something to do with dying; it had something to do with being born. Loving something and being hungry were with it too. He knew that much now. There was the prairie; there was a meadow lark, a baby pigeon, and a calf with two heads. In some haunting way the Ben was part of it. So was Mr. Digby....Some day, he thought, perhaps when he was older than he was now, he would know; he would find out completely and for good. He would be satisfied....Some day. The thing could not hide from him forever. (299)

Ken Mitchell, however, notes that although Brian still

> some day hopes to be satisfied....[he] is mistaken here. He can never understand what happens in a rational sense - just as he will never see God, or the wind. Only madmen like Saint Sammy can do that....Brian's accomplishment has been to feel the wind, to sense the presence of God in nature.[63]

Still, Brian does not give up his quest, and that is important. The fact that Mitchell has written this novel is, perhaps, an indication that he, like Brian, is still looking for the elusive answers. Mitchell himself has said,

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[61] Ricou 109.

[62] Ricou 104.

[63] K. Mitchell 40.

however, that "there is no absolute victory or answer. You simply have to be a good balancer. A good balancer."[64]

By choosing to make the focus of this book a quest for spiritual enlightenment, Mitchell indicates that he feels the spiritual is a very important aspect of life, perhaps the aspect that governs and encompasses all others. Patricia Barclay writes, "[Mitchell] has no interest in writing what he terms 'pulpit novels'; it is the 'essentially human truth' that he wishes to reveal in his serious work...."[65] Although many questions about life and faith do remain unanswered in Who Has Seen the Wind, Mitchell does look, at least tentatively, for some answers. Despite the pantheistic and romantic ideas in the novel, it is to the New Testament Gospels that he appears eventually to turn, if the actions of the praiseworthy characters in the text are any indication. For all of these people, the Golden Rule given by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is foremost: "'Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets'" (Matt. 7:12).

Christianity, as it is presented in the New Testament, is not an exclusive religion of the righteous. As demonstrated by Christ, Christianity is a religion of inclusion, not exclusion. Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector hated

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[64]O'Rourke 156.

[65]Barclay 56.

by the Jewish people, as one of His chosen disciples (Matt. 9:9). Peter, a Jew, was told to minister to Cornelius, "a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment" (Acts 10:1ff.). Thus, the Christianity of the New Testament has room for Old Wong and the China Kids and the Bens and all the other misfits of the town depicted in Who Has Seen the Wind. Christianity as put forward by Christ is a religion that involves caring for people and meeting their specific needs. Jesus fed the multitude when they were hungry (Matt. 14:13-21). He healed many people of the physical sicknesses and disabilities that were robbing them of their chance to lead full lives. Christianity is a religion of bravery, a fact proven by the death on the cross of Christ Himself and underscored by the endurance of His followers, many of whom were martyred in the face of persecution. It is a religion that honors faith and ideals, and it is a religion in which children are highly valued, as was proven when Jesus called children to Him and told His disciples that "'of such is the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt. 19:14).

Many of the qualities that are held in high esteem by the New Testament writers, and by Christ Himself, are also seen by Mitchell to be important:

> I'm really saying that technology, religion, mysticism, myth won't work, but what will work - I'm embarrassed by saying it - but what will work is love. Which covers a lot of things. But - even though civilized - one has to trust the

intuitive, gut, heart response.[66]

Yet still one wonders whether the kind of Christianity, which at times amounts almost to Christian humanism, that seems to be advocated in this novel is in itself a totally satisfactory manifestation of the Christian religion. After all, Christ did stress, in addition to service to one's fellow men and women, more mystical aspects of faith such as prayer, miracles, and communication between humankind and their God. Like Brian when he no longer experiences his "feeling," readers may be a little sad that the mystical aspects of religion must, according to Digby, pass away with maturity. And yet, Mitchell does not totally deny the validity of this part of the Christian experience. After all, Brian is still not satisfied with the partial answers he has found and resolves to keep on searching until he fully understands "Some day" (299); there is a great deal of reference to the intuitive, spiritual bond that exists between Brian and the Young Ben; and the prayer of Saint Sammy, the mystical madman, is answered, with the only explanation offered seeming to be that the answer does come from God. Mitchell suggests, as did Sinclair Ross, that another reality exists, one "'that's illusory, yet somehow more important'"[67] than that usually recognized by human

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[66]O'Rourke 156.

[67]Sinclair Ross, As For Me and My House (1941; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) 112.

beings. Mitchell has said that

> you get to a point when you discover in Who Has Seen the Wind that your thematic structure is fraught with a very mediaeval thing, a thing that St. Augustine and St. Thomas concern themselves with: what is the way to truth? What is the way to reality? Or God? Is it through reason, or is it through - I like intuition better - but is it through revelation?[68]

Perhaps what Mitchell is really calling for is a Christianity much closer to the Christianity of the Gospels than even the lives of his model characters suggest, a faith that combines practical action grounded in love and concern for one's fellows with the mystical and intangible aspects of Christ's teaching. This is a concept that Robertson Davies will explore and expand in Fifth Business. Although W. O. Mitchell rejects established Christianity and the corruption of the Gospel truth it entails, he does seem to suggest that Christianity practised in accordance with the principles of Scripture offers a defence against the cruelty and harshness that are integral parts of human [illegible]nce and at least a partial answer to the questions posed [illegible]g ago in Ecclesiastes and again in Who Has Seen the Wind.

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[68]O'Rourke 152.

CHAPTER 4

Miracles and Metaphor:

Fifth Business

Like the previous novels considered in this thesis, Robertson Davies' Fifth Business involves a spiritual search by the protagonist. The object of this search is, however, somewhat different than it was in at least two of the other texts, for Dunstan Ramsay searches not so much for God Himself as for evidence of the miraculous, that aspect of the Divine that is so prominent in the New Testament and yet has often been denied in twentieth-century Christian thought. In an expansion of the idea put forward by W. O. Mitchell when he created the prophet Saint Sammy and stressed the intuitive bond between Brian and the Young Ben, Davies, too, asserts that in order to understand the true nature of Christianity, it is necessary to enter a realm of faith and awe that men and women cannot fully understand.[1]

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[1]The view of religion Davies presents in Fifth Business is, in some respects, similar to that put forward by Rudolph Otto in his book The Idea of the Holy (Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. John W. Harvey [London: Oxford University Press, 1928]). Otto asserts that although concepts like "mercy, pity, comfort" (Otto 31), concepts explored in detail by the authors examined in this thesis, are part of the way in which human beings define their God and His precepts, these "rational" (Otto 1) ideas are only

In addition to leading his protagonist into an investigation of miracles, Davies, like Ross, Laurence, and Mitchell, does make a number of observations about the practice of Christianity by nominal Christians. He is insightful in his judgements, and many of his comments about organized religion are scathing ones. Michael Peterman notes that

> young Davies was regularly subjected to the charged rhythms of the King James Version. He heard them in his parents' speech, in the Biblical stories they read to him, and at St. Andrews Presbyterian church where his father was superintendent of the Sunday School.[2]

Such an observation would lead one to believe that Davies had a conventional Christian upbringing in which the orthodox Church and its teachings played a large part. Peterman,

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parts of a "profounder religion" (Otto 3). Otto writes

> ...the common dictum, that Orthodoxy itself has been the mother of Rationalism, is in some measure well founded....Orthodoxy found in the construction of dogma and doctrine no way to do justice to the non-rational aspect of its subject. So far from keeping the non-rational element in religion alive in the heart of the religious experience, orthodox Christianity manifestly failed to recognize its value, and by this failure gave to the idea of God a one-sidedly intellectualistic and rationalistic interpretation. (Otto 3)

Otto adds that in the examination of religion "men shut their eyes to that which is quite unique to the religious experience....Religion is not exclusively contained and exhaustively comprised in any series of 'rational' assertions..." (Otto 4). Although Davies does examine the concepts of love and social justice that are treated by the other authors considered in this thesis, his main focus is on "that which is quite unique to the religious experience."

[2]Michael Peterman, Robertson Davies, Twayne's World Authors Series (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1986) 5.

however, quotes Davies as having said,

> My mother was moralistic, but she was not of a religious temper, and was indeed somewhat anti-clerical....I think this may have been because she had been "preached against" in the Methodist Church in her girlhood....So she left that church and became a Presbyterian, but never a very doctrinal one. She was quick to detect and despise religious hypocrisy.[3]

Thus, early in Davies' childhood, he learned to question the doctrines of religious orthodoxy with which he was presented. Davies told Tom Harpur, "I was brought up in a Presbyterian family and I found Presbyterianism, even as a child, a strikingly cold and unsympathetic faith....at an early age, church chilled me; it seemed to be a combination of concert and lecture."[4] Davies commented to Donald Cameron, "The mainstream of what I do is this sense which I can only call a religious sense, but which is not religious in a sectarian, or aggressive, or evangelistic sense."[5] In Fifth Business Davies presents some unique and challenging ideas about Christianity and its practice, ideas that readers may not always readily accept, but ones that they may well stop and consider.

Once again, as in the Ross and Laurence texts, readers

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[3]Peterman 2-3.

[4]Robertson Davies, "A Talk with Tom Harpur," with Tom Harpur, The Enthusiasms of Robertson Davies, ed. Judith Skelton Grant (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979) 315.

[5]Donald Cameron, "Robertson Davies: The Bizarre and Passionate Life of the Canadian People," Conversations with Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973) 45.

are presented with an unreliable narrator. Like Rachel in A Jest of God, Dunstan Ramsay is aware of his inability to write the complete truth, and the novel is interspersed with admissions by him that all he says may not be accurate. At the very beginning of his memoir, Ramsay questions whether or not he can recount his childhood experiences truthfully. He asks, "Can I write truly of my boyhood? Or will that disgusting self-love which so often attaches itself to a man's idea of his youth creep in and falsify the story?"[6] Ramsay admits that his personality will colour his account when he says of his description of village life, "I shall be as brief as I can, for it is not by piling up detail that I hope to achieve my picture, but by putting the emphasis where I think it belongs" (16). Ramsay notes that when he told stories about Canada to Diana Marfleet,

> She wanted to know all about me, and I told her as honestly as I could; but as I was barely twenty, and a romantic myself, I know now that I lied in every word I uttered - lied not in fact but in emphasis, in colour, and in intention. (82)

The question is not, however, how much of Ramsay's account can be taken literally. It is, rather, whether or not such literal truth in telling the story of one's life is important, or even possible, given a person's biases and imperfect ability to remember details. As Ramsay says when

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[6]Robertson Davies, Fifth Business (1970; Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1977) 15. All references to Fifth Business are to this edition and will appear in parentheses in the text.

Boy vows he does not remember the incident of the snowball, "I began to wonder what I had erased from my own recollection" (261). Magnus Eisengrim confirms the innate ability of human beings to forget those things they do not want to remember when he tells Ramsay, "'We all forget many of the things we do, especially when they do not fit into the character we have chosen for ourselves'" (262). What Ramsay has remembered and the way in which he has slanted his facts are indications of who he really is and of what he holds to be most important. Ramsay, for instance, remembers in minute detail the time and date when Boy threw the snowball at Mrs. Dempster, an event that greatly affects every area of his life: "My lifelong involvement with Mrs Dempster began at 5.58 o'clock p.m. on 27 December 1908, at which time I was ten years and seven months old" (9). Other events he remembers less vividly. Of the time he spent in the Marfleet home Ramsay says,

> I only hope I behaved myself and did not talk like a fool. But when I remember those days I remember the Canon and the Honourable and Diana and what I felt about them, but little of what I did or said. (84)

A simple, truthful retelling of the events of Ramsay's life would make a story, but it would not allow the reader to see beyond the events to the man who lived them.

Unreliable or not, since Fifth Business is Ramsay's letter to the Headmaster of the school in which he has taught, Ramsay is, like Mrs. Bentley in As For Me and My

House, the only guide readers have to the events and action of the novel. Because of this, it is necessary for readers to adopt the same criteria D. J. Dooley suggested they use when reading Mrs. Bentley's diary:

> ...[his] general credibility as a witness must be accepted, or there is no novel....We must take for granted that the conversations which [he] sets down did actually occur, that the events actually happened, that people and settings look much as [he] describes them....[7]

Readers should also remember that Ramsay is, as previously noted, aware of his unreliability, and thus he is often able to signal them when they should be cautious about accepting his words at face value.

Ramsay himself personifies the dichotomy between fact as it is generally perceived and another kind of truth that is often more useful. He is an historian, but he is also a lover of myth and of the saints, two subjects that do not lend themselves easily to the usually accepted standard of historical truth. In the opening of his narrative, when he storms against Lorne Packer's article about him in the school magazine, Ramsay draws a distinction between his own view of myth and Packer's more conventional perception of history. Ramsay points out that he has written at least one book that "exerts a widening influence in the realm of mythic history" (14) and scorns Packer's "scientific view of history" (15). For Ramsay, "the borderland between history

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[7]D. J. Dooley, Moral Vision in the Canadian Novel (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1979) 40.

and myth" (14) has proven to be a hazy realm, and he has found that one merges into the other much more often than people think. Ramsay refers to his study of the saints as "puzzling over records of lives as strange as fairy tales, written by people with no sense of history" (168), and Terry Goldie observes that Ramsay "is often drawn to those saints' legends which seem to have the least historical substance, such as that of St. Uncumber."[8] Speaking of his experience in reading the New Testament, Ramsay states his conclusion "that psychological truth was really as important in its own way as historical verification" (71). In the myths Ramsay explores, as well as in his recounting of his life, the spirit of the events is more important than the actual historical details.

Writing about Deptford, Ronald Sutherland observes that "The first part of Fifth Business is an inventory of small-town Canadian values in the era of the Old Order, when the Calvinist rationale still held full sway."[9] On the surface, Deptford would seem to be a very spiritually active village:

> We had five churches: the Anglican, poor but believed to have some mysterious social supremacy;

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[8]Terry Goldie, "The Folkloric Background of Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy," Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy, ed. Robert G. Lawrence and Samuel L. Macey, ELS Monograph Series 20 (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1980) 23.

[9]Ronald Sutherland, "The Relevance of Robertson Davies," Journal of Canadian Studies 12.1 (Feb. 1977): 76.

> the Presbyterian, solvent and thought - chiefly by itself - to be intellectual; the Methodist, insolvent and fervent; the Baptist, insolvent and saved; the Roman Catholic, mysterious to most of us but clearly solvent, as it was frequently and, so we thought, quite needlessly repainted. (16)

The designations that, according to Ramsay, the townspeople attach to these churches reveal a great deal about the perception of Christianity in Deptford, however. There are social strata by which the churches are classed, with the Anglicans at the top. This kind of social distinction is referred to again later when Ramsay writes about the establishment of the United Church:

> During this uproar a few sensitive souls fled to the embrace of Anglicanism; the envious and disaffected said they did it because the Anglican Church was in some way more high-toned than the evangelical faiths, and thus they were improving their social standing. (128).

This rather cynical assessment does, in fact, prove to be accurate in the case of Boy and Leola Staunton who move "quietly into a fashionable Anglican church" (128). It is Boy's attempt to move up the social ladder rather than any desire to draw closer to God that inspires his decision to change denominations.

The designation of the Presbyterian Church as "intellectual" (16) is another aspect of this kind of superficial distinction. In Deptford, as in Manawaka, the sin of pride is evident for it is the Presbyterians themselves who think they are "intellectual" and, hence, on a level slightly above the other denominations. As was the case in <u>A Jest of</u>

God, such pride in denomination is accompanied by an inordinate and certainly unscriptural self-righteousness and pride in one's heritage and social standing. Ramsay uses his own family as an example:

> Our household, then, was representative of the better sort of life in the village, and we thought well of ourselves. Some of this good opinion arose from being Scots....The Scots, I believed until I was aged at least twenty-five, were the salt of the earth, for although this was never said in our household it was one of those accepted truths which do not need to be laboured. (17-18)

As it did in Manawaka, pride in race and righteousness carries over into racial prejudice. Of the ceremony held to honor him as a war hero Ramsay says,

> I became aware that one of our Brave Boys, namely George Muskrat the Indian sniper, who had picked off Germans just as he used to pick off squirrels, was not present. George was not a very respectable fellow (he drank vanilla extract, which was mostly alcohol, to excess, and shouted in the streets when on a toot), and he had not been given any medals. (97)

Ramsay, however, learns how foolish racial prejudice is when he leaves home to fight in the war:

> So off I went on a troopship, lectured by officers who were anxious to harden us with tales of German atrocities. These Germans, I gathered, were absolute devils; not winning campaigns, but maiming children, ravishing women (never less than ten to a single victim), and insulting religion were the things they had gone to war to accomplish; they took their tone from their Kaiser, who was a comic, mad monster; they had to be shown that decency ruled the world, and we were decency incarnate. I had by that time seen enough of Army life to think that if we were decency the Germans must be rough indeed, for a more foul-mouthed, thieving, whoring lot of toughs than some of the soldiers I met it would be hard to imagine. (69)

Ramsay states that the various churches are categorized according to their financial status, an indication that monetary worth, rather than any devotion to spiritual matters, is a distinguishing factor. The residents of Deptford are very conscious of which churches are solvent and which are not, and this same emphasis on finances is evident in Ramsay's comments about the United Church:

> Unfortunately it [the formation of this new church body] also involved some haggling between the rich Presbyterians and the poor Methodists, which roused the mocking spirit of the rest of the country; the Catholics in particular had some Irish jokes about the biggest land-and-property-grab in Canadian history. (128)[10]

From a Christian perspective, one of the most disturbing labels applied to a denomination is that which marks the Baptist Church as "insolvent and saved" (16). The Baptists, it appears, claim to be the only Deptford Christians who have found the key to Divine forgiveness and, therefore, to salvation, a gift the Scriptures promise is free and for all people.[11]

The Roman Catholic Church is set apart from all the

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[10]The New Testament contains the warning, "For the love of money is a root of all <u>kinds of</u> evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). Clearly, the apostle Paul, who wrote these words to the young Timothy, would be firmly against the idea that solvency or insolvency should be a criterion for distinguishing Christians and the denominations to which they belong.

[11]Paul writes, "Therefore, as through one man's offense <u>judgment</u> came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act <u>the free gift came</u> to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom. 5:18).

other denominations not so much because of the traditional split between Catholics and Protestants as because it is "mysterious" (16). Many times throughout Fifth Business Davies draws attention to the fear of the unknown and the "mysterious" that is part of the heritage of fundamental religion, a fear that is evident when Amasa Dempster calls Dunstable into his study and accuses him of corrupting Paul. In accordance with the absolutes taught by the emotional religion of which he is a part, Amasa exaggerates Dunstable's sin in teaching Paul magic. He calls Dunstable "the agent...by means of which the Evil One had trailed his black slime across a pure life" (41) and refers to the playing-cards to which Dunstable has introduced Paul as "the Devil's picture-book" (42).

Involvement with magic and sorcery is warned against throughout the entire Bible. In Isaiah the following promise is found:

> "But these two things shall come to you
> In a moment, in one day:
> The loss of children, and widowhood.
> They shall come upon you in their fullness
> Because of the multitude of your sorceries,
> For the great abundance of your enchantments."
> (Isa. 47:9)

In Revelation John writes,

> Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.
> But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. (Rev. 22:14-15)

That Amasa, in light of his study of Scripture, is afraid of

and soundly condemns the practice of magic is understandable. What is irrational, however, is that his fear of what is mysterious carries over to his feeling about the Roman Catholic Church, the practices of which are beyond his comprehension. Amasa accuses Dunstable of "papistry" (42) because he has been telling Paul about the saints. The Baptist parson adds that "the veneration of saints was one of the vilest superstitions of the Scarlet Woman of Rome" (42).[12] Amasa, along with the other Protestants of Deptford, is unable to accept mystery in any form. As was the case when Saint Sammy set up his piano box and began to prophesy about God's coming wrath and when the congregation of the Tabernacle began to speak in tongues, in Deptford, everything that cannot be reduced to practical, understand-

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[12]Amasa's reference to "the Scarlet Woman" is inspired by Revelation 17:3-6:

> And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.
> The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.
> And on her forehead a name was written:
> MYSTERY,
> BABYLON THE GREAT,
> THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE
> ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.
> And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

Reverend Dempster is not alone in identifying this mysterious harlot with the Roman Catholic Church. Many Protestants over the years have made a similar claim. It is ironic that Amasa, who is so quick to pin the title of "harlot" on a neighbouring church, is forced to see his own wife inherit the designation.

able human terms is suspect and may well be allied with the forces of evil against which the Scriptures caution.[13]

In opposition to the feeling against Roman Catholics that is prevalent in Protestant Deptford, Ramsay associates himself with the Bollandists and thus discovers how unfounded religious prejudice can be:

> I now realize that, although I thought I had purged my mind of nonsense about Jesuits, some dregs of mistrust remained. I thought, for instance, that they were going to be preternaturally subtle and that in conversation I would have to be very careful - about what, I did not know. Certainly if they possessed any extraordinary gifts of subtlety they did not waste them on me. I suspected too that they would smell the black Protestant blood in my veins, and I would never gain their trust. On the contrary, my Protestantism made me a curiosity and something of a pet. (169)

Padre Blazon excepted, since he is set apart by Davies as an extraordinary representative of the Bollandist brotherhood, Ramsay finds that the Jesuits with whom he comes in contact are more curious about his use of index cards than about the

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[13]In the same way that Steve's removal from the Bentley home in As For Me and My House was shown by Ross to be a result of religious prejudice on the part of both Protestants and Catholics, the mistrust between the members of these branches of the Christian faith that is evident in Fifth Business is not portrayed by Davies as a purely Protestant trait. Padre Blazon says of Mary,

> "She is a Protestant. What does it matter? To be a Protestant is halfway to being an atheist, of course, and your innumerable sects have not recognized any saints of their own since the Reformation, so-called." (174)

Even in his intimate conversations with Padre Blazon, Ramsay is still regarded by the old Jesuit as a "'nice Protestant boy!'" (172), and Blazon makes reference to Ramsay's "'muddled Protestant mind'" (177-78).

differences in faith he represents.

As stated in the discussion of A Jest of God, such barriers and divisive elements as those pointed out here are in direct opposition to the unity called for in the New Testament. Although Ramsay notes that there is no animosity among the denominations in Deptford, he makes it plain that there is little meaningful contact between the members of the various churches. With reference to his Presbyterian mother's decision to help the Baptist parson's wife he says,

> Not that there was any ill-will among the denominations in our village, but it was understood that each looked after its own, unless a situation got too big, when outside help might be called in. (11-12)

Deptford's denominational barriers are not hard and fast, but they are in place.

It is the severe system of religious thought brought to Canada by the early settlers that, Davies seems to assert, lies at the heart of the Protestant denominations and of much that is evil and hurtful in Deptford. Ramsay reports,

> I have already said that while our village contained much of what humanity has to show, it did not contain everything, and one of the things it conspicuously lacked was an aesthetic sense; we were all too much the descendants of hard-bitten pioneers to wish for or encourage any such thing, and we gave hard names to qualities that, in a more sophisticated society, might have had value. (25)

This stern inheritance of the residents of Deptford results, as did such a heritage in Manawaka, in an insistence on conformity and a narrowness of thought that are key factors in

creating the divisions that separate individuals. The town's "self-satisfied littleness of mind"[14] accounts for the residents' low opinion of Mary Dempster even before her disgrace in the gravel pit:

> Mrs Dempster was not pretty - we understood prettiness and guardedly admitted it as a pleasant, if needless, thing in a woman - but she had a gentleness of expression and a delicacy of colour that was uncommon....Mrs Dempster was small and slight, and even the clothes approved for a preacher's wife did not conceal the fact that she had a girlish figure and a light step. When she was pregnant there was a bloom about her that seemed out of keeping with the seriousness of her state; it was not at all the proper thing for a pregnant woman to smile so much.... (25-26)

The confining patterns of thought that are prevalent in Deptford have resulted in the establishment of standards for clothing and appearance, especially for those involved in the Christian ministry, and even standards governing the proper expression to be worn during pregnancy. Once again, as in the other novels considered in this thesis, there is evidence that the rigid codes of behaviour result in a denial of joy and even of the miracle of birth, since it is considered entirely unsuitable for a woman to smile when she carries new life within her.

In Deptford, the practice of Christianity is bounded by prescribed limits. The initial feeling about Mrs. Dempster is that "She was a nice little thing, but was that soft voice ever going to dominate a difficult meeting of the

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[14]Cameron 34.

Ladies' Aid?" (26).[15] It is inconceivable to these people that there could be forms of Christian experience more important than Ladies' Aid meetings. The residents of the village have been so used to a Christianity that includes contentious women fighting for their ideas that they are unprepared to accept Mary Dempster's ministry of softness and joy. Ronald Sutherland writes, "She [Mary Dempster] is pretty, sensual, childlike, spontaneous and 'utterly unfit to be a preacher's wife.'...she is gentle and compassionate, which proves to be her undoing."[16]

Enslavement to conformity is again evident when Paul is born and Amasa insists on christening him. In itself, this is not an act of conformity since, as Ramsay remarks, it is "by no means in accord with the belief of his faith," and Amasa may, as Ramsay surmises, be "acting in response to promptings stronger than seminary training" (20). When it comes to the method to be used for the christening, however, Amasa finds that the Baptist doctrine is strong in him.

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[15]With reference to the Ladies' Aid, Ramsay also notes that when the seriously ill Willie "dies," Mrs. Ramsay is at Deptford's Fall Fair helping to serve a "Fowl Supper" (58) put on by this organization. He tells readers that "she was a noted organizer and pusher of fancy victuals" (58). Ramsay states that much of Mrs. Ramsay's anger against Mary Dempster is a result of her own guilt "because she had been absent, making a great figure of herself in the Ladies' Aid, when duty should have kept her at Willie's bedside" (61). Ramsay's statements about the Ladies' Aid and its activities remind one of Mrs. Bentley's comments about that time-honoured church institution.

[16]Sutherland 77.

Baptists believe strictly in baptism by immersion, and Amasa wants to "dip the child in water" (20), although this could have disastrous results for an infant as fragile as Paul. Amasa allows his allegiance to a time-honoured doctrine of his denomination to take precedence over common sense.

In Deptford's value system, enslavement to conformity is matched by enslavement to the "Protestant work ethic." Ramsay writes,

> It came out that she [Mary Dempster] had been brought up by an aunt, who had money and kept a hired girl, and how were you to forge a preacher's wife from such weak metal as that? (27)

Anyone who has not been exposed to hard work cannot possibly, according to the residents of Deptford, be expected to meet the standards of religious behaviour that have been prescribed. It is necessary to live a life of deprivation, if not actual suffering, in order to be a worthwhile member of the kingdom of God. The idea that work, although necessary, is not to be enjoyed is evident in Ramsay's account of Dr. McCausland's lecture to him following Willie's resurrection:

> He hinted that I might become like Elbert Hubbard if I continued in my present course. Elbert Hubbard was a notoriously queer American who thought that work could be a pleasure. (63)

The faithful of Deptford live by rigid standards of morality, and as part of this moral code, these upright citizens have developed a horror of sex and all matters connected with it. It is this aversion to sex that, in

fact, occasions much of Dunstable's guilt over ducking the snowball that hits Mary Dempster:

> ...I suffered greatly in my mind, for a reason connected with my time of life. I was just upon eleven, and I matured early, so that some of the earliest changes of puberty were beginning in me. ...certainly in my childhood the common attitude toward matters of sex was enough to make a hell of adolescence for any boy who was, like myself, deeply serious and mistrustful of whatever seemed pleasurable in life. So here I was, subject not only to the smutty, whispering speculations of the other boys I knew, and tormented by the suspicion that my parents were somehow involved in this hog-wallow of sex that had begun to bulk so large in my thoughts, but I was directly responsible for a grossly sexual act - the birth of a child. (23-24)

It is also this extreme distaste for all things sexual that causes the residents of Deptford, especially the women, to turn completely against Mary Dempster after her encounter with the tramp in the town gravel pit. Mary's generous giving of her favours is totally incomprehensible to the women of Deptford:

> Mrs Dempster had transgressed in a realm where there could be no shades of right and wrong. And the reason she had offered for doing so - !
>
> That was what stuck in the craws of all the good women of Deptford: Mrs Dempster had not been raped, as a decent woman would have been - no, she had yielded because a man wanted her. The subject was not one that could be freely discussed even among intimates, but it was understood without saying that if women began to yield for such reasons as that, marriage and society would not last long. (49-50)

Michael Peterman writes that in Fifth Business Davies "articulat[es] his impatience with the range of narrow and

life-denying moral values that fetter real growth."[17] Davies points out, for example, that inflexibly clinging to one's moral beliefs can even result in division within families. After Boy and Leola move to Toronto, Dr. and Mrs. Staunton refuse to visit their son's home "where drink was consumed contrary to the law of the land and against God's manifest will" (128). During the scene in which the Reverend Dempster accuses him of corrupting Paul, young Ramsay - Dunstable - observes the impact a fixed moral framework can have:

> ...I had been worsted by moral bullying, by Dempster's conviction that he was right and I was wrong, and that gave him an authority over me based on feeling rather than reason: it was my first encounter with the emotional power of popular morality. (43)

In Ramsay's mind, Christianity comes to be completely associated with moral concerns. Having learned that Diana Marfleet's father is "a domestic chaplain at Windsor" (82), Ramsay assumes that "he jawed the Royal Family about morals, just as the parsons jawed us at home" (83).

The denial of emotion that inhibited the citizens of Manawaka in all areas of their lives is also evident in Deptford. With reference to Amasa Dempster's attempts to comfort his wife after the accident with the snowball, Ramsay says that he spoke to her

> in terms of endearment that were strange and embarrassing to me; I had never heard married

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[17]Peterman 132.

> people - or any people - speak unashamedly loving words before. I knew that I was watching a "scene", and my parents had always warned against scenes as very serious breaches of propriety. (11)

Later he says of Amasa,

> His quality of feeling was weighty. I suppose this is what made him acceptable to the Baptists, who valued feeling very highly - much more highly than we Presbyterians, who were scared of it and tried to swap it for intellect. (41)

Christianity, as it is practised in the Ramsay home, is an example of the "stricken, lifeless, unreal" (52) religion that is in direct opposition to evangelical emotion. Early in the novel, Davies acquaints readers with the fact that the formalities of Christian worship are observed by the Ramsays. Ramsay states that according to his parents' rules he must be in his place at the table, his "head bent for grace" (10), promptly at six o'clock. This coupling of prayer with the rigid time frame imposed on meals seems to indicate that the saying of grace may be more a part of family ritual than a heart-felt attempt to praise the God who has provided food.

The subject of guilt occasioned by overly strict religious indoctrination forms an important theme in Fifth Business. About the writing of this novel Davies has said,

> ...I had been occupied, in my few leisure hours, with problems of guilt. Where did it arise? At what age was a human creature capable of feeling and assuming the burden of guilt? Were the truly guilty always as burdened as were those whose upbringing and moral training disposed them to feel guilt and perhaps also to assume guilt which was not truly theirs? The novel [Fifth Business], when I began to write it, was about guilt, and not

revenge, though revenge played some part in it.[18] The fact that Dunstable is involved in the snowball incident that supposedly robs Mary Dempster of her sanity disturbs him deeply, and he is eloquent in describing his experience with "the guilt of concealment as well as action" (25):

> So I was alone with my guilt, and it tortured me. I was a Presbyterian child and I knew a good deal about damnation. We had a Dante's Inferno among my father's books, with the illustrations by Doré...it had once been a shivery pleasure to look at those pictures. Now I knew that they showed the reality of my situation, and what lay beyond this life for such a boy as I. I was of the damned. Such a phrase seems to mean nothing to people nowadays, but to me it was utterly real. (23)

He adds, "Ah, if dying were all there was to it! Hell and torment at once; but at least you know where you stand. It is living with these guilty secrets that exacts the price" (25). Initially, Dunstable believes that he can persuade Percy Boyd Staunton, the thrower of the fateful snowball, to assume some of the burden of responsibility for Mary Dempster's condition. Percy vows, however, that the snowball actually hit Dunstable, and he is entirely unwilling to consider any other version of events. Dunstable's upbringing has prepared him so well to assume guilt that, when circumstances seem to demand it, he readily takes on guilt for two. Ramsay notes that "His [Boy's] brazen-faced refusal to

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[18]Robertson Davies, "The Deptford Trilogy in Retrospect," Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy, ed. Robert G. Lawrence and Samuel L. Macey, ELS Monograph Series 20 (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1980) 8.

accept responsibility seemed to deepen my own guilt" (25). Ronald Sutherland, who also drew attention to the concept of guilt evident in Who Has Seen the Wind, writes,

> As a boy, Ramsay has all the familiar traits of the old national hero....he acquires a guilt complex....One thinks of the multitude of miserable children in Canadian literature....[19]

Ramsay allows this guilt he acquires as a child to influence virtually his whole life. He acts as Mary Dempster's friend and confidant, braving the taunting remarks of his schoolfellows and also his mother's displeasure, which manifests itself once Mary has fallen into disfavour with the villagers. He searches Mrs. Dempster out following her husband's death and eventually has himself appointed her guardian. He visits her faithfully during her time in the mental asylum to which she has been committed, and even after Mary is completely overcome by her madness so that Ramsay can no longer have contact with her, he cannot free himself from his feeling of responsibility for the woman he believes he has wronged: "But I did go [back] once, driven by guilt, and though I did not see her, her window was pointed out to me, and it was in the wing where the windows were barred" (233). It is even possible that Ramsay's tireless quest to prove Mary a saint can be attributed, at least in part, to the guilt he feels over having been involved in her misfortune and his desire to do some-

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[19]Sutherland 77.

thing for her that will compensate for all her sufferings. Ramsay's guilt costs him a great deal, not only in emotional stress, but also in the loss of time and resources that could have been devoted to his personal pleasures. Of his decision to move Mary to a better facility he says,

> It meant a substantial monthly cost, and though my fortunes had increased to the point where I could afford it, my personal expenditures had to be curtailed, and I was wondering how often in future I would be able to travel in Europe. (231)

In spite of all he has done for Mary, however, the guilt that is strong in Ramsay refuses to be assuaged. It is still the controlling force as he stands beside Mary's coffin:

> And then I begged forgiveness for myself because, though I had done what I imagined was my best, I had not been loving enough, or wise enough, or generous enough in my dealings with her. (245)

Those who attempt to teach Ramsay wisdom try to dissuade him from his obsession with guilt, and they point out the harm it has already done in his life. Padre Blazon tells him bluntly, "'I think you are a fool to fret that she [Mary Dempster] was knocked on the head because of an act of yours'" (177). He points out that Ramsay has been led to believe that despising himself is part of being "'a good Protestant'" (178) and advises him:

> "You are still young enough to think that torment of the spirit is a splendid thing, a sign of a superior nature. But you are no longer a young man...it is time you found out that these spiritual athletics do not lead to wisdom. Forgive yourself for being a human creature, Ramezay. That is the beginning of wisdom; that is what is

> meant by the fear of God; and for you it is the only way to save your sanity." (178)

Liesl points out how Ramsay's development as a human being has been inhibited by his intense feelings of guilt and his consequent involvement in the lives of other people. She asks, "'How can you be really good to anybody if you are not good to yourself?'" (226). It is difficult, however, for Ramsay to forget the lessons that were instilled in him so well in childhood. Ramsay's parents knew the value of guilt as a controlling force and made sure their son knew it, too. His punishment for a misdemeanour that had supposedly caused his mother grief involved reciting a pledge "that [he] would always love [his] mother, to whom [he] owed the great gift of life" (36). This pledge is reminiscent of Mrs. Cameron's many ploys used throughout A Jest of God to instill guilt in Rachel, consequently ensuring her obedience. As a result of his experiences in the war, Ramsay believes that he has finally been able to abandon his feelings of guilt. He later finds, however, that "the guilt had only been thrust away, or thrust down out of sight, for here it was again, in full strength, clamouring to be atoned, now that the opportunity offered itself" (160).

The guilt that Ramsay has been conditioned to know has far-reaching effects. As well as feeling responsible for Mary's condition, Dunstable also feels guilt about the child who is born prematurely following Mrs. Dempster's accident. Because of this he befriends Paul and entertains him with

magic tricks and stories about the saints. Paul thus begins to develop that interest in sleight of hand and in the miraculous that will one day lead him away from prosaic Deptford and into his role as a great illusionist. Guilt also causes Ramsay to keep the stone from the ill-fated snowball as a reminder of his part in the incident. The discovery of this stone by Magnus and Boy leads Ramsay to reveal to Paul the details of his mother's accident. Thus the stone, symbol of Ramsay's guilty secret, plays a major part in Boy's death. Unresolved guilt is, apparently, an unpredictable and dangerous factor to have operating in one's life.

In the village of Deptford, however, guilt is a respected emotion, and Ramsay is not the only one to suffer as a result of this belief. Paul Dempster is also one of its victims. He tells Ramsay and Boy,

> "I have never been able to forget what she [Mary Dempster] was or what people called her. Because, you see, it was my birth that made her like that. My father thought it his duty to tell me, so that I could do whatever was possible to make it up to her. My birth was what robbed her of her sanity ....I was too young for the kind of guilt my father wanted me to feel; he had an extraordinary belief in guilt as an educative force. I couldn't stand it. I cannot feel guilt now." (260-61)

The imposition of too much false guilt has, in fact, made Paul an emotional cripple. He is a brilliant illusionist, but he is unable to determine the moral consequences of his actions. Boy Staunton has reacted to the village's concept of guilt in much the same way as has Paul, by moving away

from it entirely. Boy's first denial of his part in the throwing of the snowball may, in fact, be merely a pretense occasioned by fear of punishment should his action be discovered. By the end of the novel, however, Boy's denial of responsibility has become complete. When, in Paul's presence, Ramsay asks Boy if he has "'no recollection of Mrs Dempster'" (261), Boy replies, "'None at all. Why should I?'" (261). Ramsay writes,

> I could hardly believe he spoke the truth, but as we talked on I had to accept it as a fact that he had so far edited his memory of his early days that the incident of the snowball had quite vanished from his mind. (261)

Boy has moved so far from the code of beliefs held in Deptford that responsibility for the griefs caused to others has no part in his life. Like Paul, he seems to be unable to feel guilt and many other emotions as well. He cannot, for instance, comprehend how his infidelities and lack of understanding affect his wife Leola. Lacking emotion, his life also lacks zest. In fact, Boy's dissatisfaction is so great that it even results in thoughts of suicide

Mary Dempster is one more character affected by Deptford's feelings about the value of guilt. It is partly because she lacks this emotion that she is ostracized from the community. Mary does not fall at her husband's feet in shame after being found in the act of adultery. Instead, she calmly explains, "'He [the tramp] was very civil, 'Masa. And he wanted it so badly'" (48). In opposition to the

religious standards prevalent among the villagers, Mary neither feels guilt as a result of her own deeds nor requires that others feel guilt in consequence of their actions toward her. Ramsay states that for a time he

> had kept away from Mrs Dempster, partly from obedience and fear and partly because [he] could not bear to face her when so many hateful opinions about her were ringing in [his] ears. (65)

When he does go to see her, however, he notes that "She spoke to me as if I had visited her as often as usual" (65). This reaction is in marked contrast to Fiona Ramsay's guilt-inducing demand that Dunstable choose between "'that woman'" (64) and her. Ramsay says of Mary, "It was as though she were an exile from a world that saw things her way, and though she was sorry Deptford did not understand her she was not resentful" (53). Mary does not consciously react against the Deptford conception of guilt; she simply seems to be unfamiliar with such an idea.

The kind of religion practised in Deptford does little to foster love and concern for one's fellows. The useless quality of much of the Christian charity in the village is perhaps nowhere better exemplified than in Ramsay's explanation of how the Grenfell Mission was sent any books the library did not want "on the principle that savages would read anything" (33). This kind of charity involves no sacrifice at all on the part of the givers, nor does it require any understanding of the persons to whom they are ministering. It is merely an easy way to salve consciences

and dispose of useless goods. The welfare of the Deptford population is considered first, and then the leftovers are apportioned to those in need. Such selfish "love" is also demonstrated by Mrs. Ramsay when she refuses to admit that Dunstable's love could be great enough to encompass two women:

> It was clear that she now regarded a hint of tenderness toward Mrs Dempster as disloyalty to herself, and...loyalty was the only kind of love she could bring herself to ask for.... (63)

Love, like the material goods of Deptford, must be guarded jealously, for it is in short supply. Dunstable, however, realizes that to surrender to such a concept "would be the end of anything that was any good in me" (64). Love like Mrs. Ramsay's is not the all-encompassing love of the Gospels that causes one "'to lay down one's life for his friends'" (John 15:13). It is a self-centered corruption of this idea.

Like Laurence in A Jest of God, Davies is concerned with the long-reaching effects of such a restrictive and stultifying upbringing as that experienced by Dunstable Ramsay in Deptford. When Amasa Dempster accuses Dunstable, unjustly the boy thinks, the youngster "ill-wishes" Amasa, calling on the God of retribution about whom he has been taught:

> This was a terrible thing to do, and I knew it. In my parents' view of life, superstition was trash for ignorant people, but they had a few reservations, and one was that it was very unlucky to ill-wish anybody. The evil wish would surely

> rebound upon the wisher. But I ill-wished Dempster; I begged Somebody - some God who understood me - that he should be made very sorry for the way he had talked to me. (43)

There is the suggestion in <u>Fifth Business</u> that the effects of Dunstable's "ill-wishing" do, in fact, follow him into the future. Regardless of the new spiritual insights he gains, Ramsay continues long after this incident to cling to a belief in a God who exacts "'eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot'" (Exod. 21:24), and after the war he asks, "Was not a leg full and fair payment for an evil action?" (160). Both the concept of Divine vengeance and the moral code learned in Deptford continue to have a substantial effect on Ramsay's life. Liesl tells the fifty-year-old Ramsay, "'That horrid village and your hateful Scots family made you a moral monster. Well, it is not too late for you to enjoy a few years of almost normal humanity'" (217). About leaving Deptford following his return there as a war hero, Ramsay says, "...I boarded the train ...and left Deptford in the flesh. It was not for a long time that I recognized that I never wholly left it in the spirit" (107). F. L. Radford comments that Ramsay's memoir

> is a warning of the cost of a Deptford childhood in terms of belated acceptance of one's own humanity and that of others. The crippling effects of what Eisengrim calls 'an extraordinary belief in guilt as an educative force' (261) can never be wholly cured any more than Ramsay's artificial leg

wholly replaces his real one.[20]

Although the religious teaching that is part of his Deptford upbringing continues to affect Ramsay's life, he makes it clear that, at least on a conscious level, he wants nothing more to do with the sort of religion he has seen practised there. As Ross, Mitchell, and Laurence did before him, Davies presents a number of alternatives to the kind of Christianity his protagonist has encountered in his native village. These, however, are found by Ramsay to be equally unacceptable.

As was the case in As For Me and My House and A Jest of God, atheism is rejected as a replacement for the village concept of religion. Sam West, Deptford's atheist electrician, mocks the Reverend Andrew Bowyer praying, "'O Lord, take Thou a live coal from off Thine altar and touch our lips'" and says of the minister, "'Wouldn't he be surprised if his prayer was answered!'" (54). Ramsay states, however,

> If he hoped to make an atheist of me, this was where he went wrong; I knew a metaphor when I heard one, and I liked metaphor better than reason. I have known many atheists since Sam, and they all fall down on metaphor. (54-55)

Ramsay, like Rachel in A Jest of God, seems to feel that liberal theology is scarcely more rewarding than is atheism. Whereas in the former novel the United Church was

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[20] F. L. Radford, "The Great Mother and the Boy: Jung, Davies, and Fifth Business," Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy, ed. Robert G. Lawrence and Samuel L. Macey, ELS Monograph Series 20 (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1980) 79.

the proponent of modern religious thought, in Fifth Business those who have expanded their thinking to include new and supposedly enlightened views are chiefly members of the Anglican denomination.[21] Ramsay first encounters this sort of Christianity in the home of his nurse, Diana Marfleet. Canon Marfleet is "a domestic chaplain at Windsor as well as a parish clergyman" (82), but Ramsay observes that

> The Canon was a charming man, quite unlike any clergyman I had ever known, and even at the Sunday midday meal he never talked about religion. Like a good Presbyterian, I tried once or twice to pass him a compliment on his discourse at morning service and pursue its theme, but he wanted none of that. He wanted to talk about the war, and as he was well informed and a Lloyd George supporter it was not the usual hate session in which he invited me to engage. (84)

It is to the Canon's credit that his education protects him from falling prey to the blind hatred and prejudice often evident in the Deptford church members, but it must be noted that for the Canon, the observance of Christian principles and traditions is merely part of his ministerial duties.

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[21]Although in Fifth Business the Anglican Church is the fortress of liberal thinkers and social climbers, Davies is too astute a thinker to generalize and claim that all the members of any denomination are self-seeking humanists. When Milo Papple tells Ramsay about the flu epidemic in Deptford, he includes the following anecdote:

> "You remember Roy Janes and his wife, the Anglican minister? They never rested, going around to sick houses, and then both of 'em died themselves within forty-eight hours. The reeve put the town flag at half-mast that day, and everybody said he done right." (105)

Here in the midst of Deptford's most socially desirable church is the selfless service to one's neighbours called for by Christ.

Once his sermon has been completed, he has no interest in teaching or preaching in Christ's name. There are simply more interesting things to discuss.

Diana explains to Dunstan (whom she has renamed) that

> Because of the war the Marfleets were living very simply - only two servants and a gardener three times a week - and the Canon had followed royal example and forbidden alcoholic liquors in his household for the duration, except for a glass or two of port when he felt peaky. They restricted their daily bath-water to three inches, to save fuel for Our Cause. (83)

The sacrifices made by the Canon and his family are so small as to be laughable. The Canon may have left behind many of the inhibiting beliefs and strictures that are part of the kind of religion adhered to in Deptford, but he has, like the bland Reverend MacElfrish of Manawaka, left behind the meat of Christianity as well. The religion of the Marfleets, like that found in the United Church in Manawaka, is as unsubstantial as the faith of the biblical Laodiceans that was soundly condemned and rejected by Christ as being "'lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot'" (Rev. 3:16). Ramsay says, "How my spirit expanded in the home of the Marfleets!" (84). Although he may have felt a lifting of the Deptford bonds and taboos in this home of liberal thinkers, it is difficult to believe that Ramsay's development during this time was truly spiritual in the sense of coming closer to his God.

The liberal approach to Christianity with which Ramsay is confronted in the Marfleet home is intensified in the

beliefs and doctrines put forward by the Reverend George Malden Leadbeater, whom Boy meets on his honeymoon trip to Europe. Leadbeater has perverted Christianity into a doctrine for the rich. He, like Bent Candy in Who Has Seen the Wind, has adopted a religion that is in direct opposition to Christ's pronouncement that "'it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'" (Matt. 19:24). Boy is telling the truth when he reports, "'He isn't like any other preacher you've ever met'" (120). According to Leadbeater, Christ, who is said in the Bible to have begun His adult life as a carpenter in Nazareth, was actually "'a designer and manufacturer'" (121). The New Testament records that as disciples Jesus chose, among others, the common fishermen "Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother" (Matt. 4:18) and "James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother" (Matt. 4:21). Jesus told His followers, "'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head'" (Matt. 8:20). Leadbeater claims, however,

> "...when He was travelling around, staying with all kinds of rich and influential people as an honoured guest - obviously He wasn't just bumming his way through Palestine; He was staying with people who knew Him as a man of substance who also had a great philosophy. You know, the way those Orientals make their pile before they go in for philosophy." (121)

The story of a sinful woman pouring ointment on Jesus' feet to prove her devotion to her Lord and to verify her desire to repent (Luke 7:37-50) becomes for Leadbeater an illustra-

tion of Jesus' knowledge of life's finer things: "'He knew good ointment from bad, you can bet'" (121). The changing of the water to wine at Cana (John 2:1-11) loses all spiritual significance when Leadbeater explains that Jesus

> "helped the host out of a tight place when the drinks gave out, because he had probably been in the same fix Himself in His days in business and knew what social embarrassment was." (121)

Leadbeater's life-style reflects his interpretations of Scripture. The Christ of the New Testament ministered to the poor and instructed His followers to do likewise (Matt. 25:31-46), but to Ramsay Boy says of Leadbeater, travelling in First Class, "'I wouldn't want to ask him to come down here [to the Second Class quarters]'" (122). Leadbeater, who "'simply loves beauty'" (121), has a "'tailor in London'" (122) and "'a handful of gemstones - semi-precious but gorgeous - in his right-hand coat pocket, _just to feel_!'" (122). George Leadbeater is a long way from the fervent, if sometimes misguided, Amasa Dempster who earned "$550 _per annum_" doing "the Lord's work" (26). There is no sacrifice in the service of God for this minister. Boy informs Ramsay that the Reverend Leadbeater is "'no six-hundred-dollar-a-year Bible buster, but a man who pulls down eighty-five hundred from his pulpit alone, and doubles it with lectures and books!'" (122). Boy explains Leadbeater's fascination with wealth by saying, "'If Christ wasn't poor - and He certainly wasn't - George doesn't intend to be'" (122).

According to Boy, Leadbeater's philosophy is that "'God made beautiful and seemly things, and not to take advantage of them is to miss what God meant'" (122). Surely no thinking theologian would disagree with this statement in general. As Boy goes on, however, it becomes evident that Leadbeater's understanding of what is "'beautiful and seemly'" is very limited. Boy says that it is the beauty of his gemstones, not the contemplation of spiritual truth, that transforms Leadbeater's face. The "'beautiful and seemly'" things he values are those that have a high market value in the human sphere. Leadbeater's real opinion of the simple and beautiful things fashioned by God is evident in his statement about his gems, "'"Lo, these are beautiful even as His raindrops, and no less His work than the leper, the flower, or woman's smile"'" (122). The clergyman lists the things that exemplify natural beauty with the leper, an image of disease and suffering. Such an association indicates that Leadbeater thinks beauty of this kind is worth very little indeed.

Leadbeater has actually done very little serious thinking about the truth contained in Scripture. This is evident when he calls the leper a work of God and also when he says, "'"Poverty and sin are not all that God hath wrought"'" (122). According to orthodox Christian belief, Christ came to bridge the gap sin creates between a righteous God and His flawed children. Like most of Leadbeater's claims, his

statement that God created "'poverty and sin'" is scripturally unsound and indicates that Leadbeater spends very little time studying the word of the God he claims to serve. Ramsay rightly wonders if he "had read the New Testament as often as I had" (122).[22] The Reverend Leadbeater recommends that Leola read not the Bible but the popular novel "'If Winter Comes'" (122) to help her grow and mature. Ramsay says of Leadbeater's brand of Christianity, "It seemed to me that...Leadbeater's [taste] in religion, was evidence of a sweet tooth, and nothing more" (122). Like Canon Marfleet, the Reverend Leadbeater subscribes to a religion of privilege. Leadbeater has, with his explanations of Christ's behaviour, removed the element of Divinity from his religion and has, like the Christians in A Jest of God, reduced Jesus Christ, the God-Man, to a very human level.

The church Boy and Leola finally decide to attend is, understandably after Boy's encounter with George Leadbeater, headed by another liberal theologian. Ramsay informs readers that "the rector, Canon Arthur Woodiwiss, was so broad-minded he did not even insist that they [Boy and Leola] be

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[22]As stated previously in this thesis, Jesus claimed, "'I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly'" (John 10:10), and throughout His ministry on earth He did His best to abolish sin and sickness as "works of the devil" (1 John 3:8) that would rob mankind of this abundance. Sin, the Bible teaches, is divorced totally from God, and its presence separates God's creation from Him. The apostle Paul writes, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

confirmed" (128). Any ideals to which Woodiwiss has managed to hold fast crumble under pressure from the socially prominent Boy. Ramsay notes that Boy's second wedding "was neither a religious ceremony nor a merrymaking. It is best described as A Function" (238):

> Bishop Woodiwiss married them, being assured that Denyse had not been the offending party in her divorce; he demurred even then, but Boy persuaded him, saying to me afterward that diocesan care and rumours of the death of God were eroding the Bishop's intellect. (238)

Woodiwiss, who begins his work for the Lord as a mere canon, moves on to the position of "archdeacon" (185), and finally attains the status of bishop, learns that compromise is a necessary part of the climb.

If liberalism does not provide the answers for the seekers in this novel, neither is the kind of asceticism and evangelical fervour exemplified by Joel Surgeoner an adequate solution to the spiritual dilemmas presented in Fifth Business. Surgeoner does appeal to Ramsay's love of the miraculous. He claims that his life has been transformed totally through Divine intervention, with Mary Dempster acting as the instrument through which this transformation has been achieved. Surgeoner links himself with the miracles performed by Christ and recorded in the New Testament when he tells Ramsay that he is a modern counterpart of "'the man who was delivered from devils by Our Lord'" (135). Father Regan is cynical about Surgeoner's conversion, saying,

> "I've reformed a tramp or two myself; they get spells of repentance, like most people. This fella you tell me of, now, seems to be as extreme in his zeal as he was in his sin. I never like that." (137-38)

Still, it is an undeniable fact that Surgeoner's life has undergone a dramatic change. Ramsay explains that he "laboured to do something for destitute and defeated people, and for the sailors on the boats that plied the Great Lakes" (129), and one must surely recognize a nobility of sentiment in Surgeoner's claims that prayer has brought him the "fifty men...lying on cots" (132) in his mission and that he will use the money earned from his talk at Ramsay's school to buy them "'a lot of warm underclothes'" (132). He tells Ramsay, "'I'm just glad when a boozer sobers up, or a man stops beating his woman, or a crooked lad tries to go straight'" (133). Here is the practical, selfless concern for one's fellows called for in Scripture,[23] and Ramsay describes Surgeoner as having "a compelling quality of sincerity about him" (129). The reformed tramp certainly seems to be the product of a miracle, and he believes that God continues to intervene in a miraculous way in the work he does. He tells Ramsay that he supports his Lifeline Mission

> by begging, and that sometimes begging yielded nothing; when this happened he prayed for help, and had never been refused what he needed; the blankets, or more often the food, would appear somehow, often late in the day, and more often

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[23]For a description of the kind of concern called for by Christ see Matthew 25:34-40. This passage is quoted as note 34 in the second chapter of this thesis.

> than not, left on the steps of the Mission by anonymous donors. (130)

The provision of which Surgeoner speaks appears, however, to be in rather short supply when Ramsay visits the Mission:

> Everything about it was poor; the lower parts of the windows were painted over with green paint, and the lettering on them - "Lifeline Mission, Come In" - was an amateur job. Inside the electric light was scanty and eked out by a couple of coal-oil lamps on the table in front; on benches made of reclaimed wood sat eight or ten people.... (130)

Ramsay observes that the revival hymn he hears is "dismal" and "sung with the dispirited drag of the unaccompanied, untalented religious" (131). He notes that Surgeoner's method of prayer is little more than "put[ting] in his order" (131) for all the things the Mission needs. In addition, Surgeoner's miracles do not have about them the same air of mystery that surrounds those supposedly performed by Mary Dempster; his are firmly grounded in the workings of the real world. Although Surgeoner testifies that God never fails to meet his needs, it appears that the man himself must do a lot of lecturing and promoting toward that end, and when an answer to his prayers comes, it is often through very human means. After talking with Surgeoner and hearing his story, Ramsay leaves a ten-dollar bill on the table at the Mission. Surgeoner responds, "'Thank you, Mr Ramsay....this will get us the soup kettle we need, and a load of wood as well. Do you see now how prayers are answered?'" (136). As Ramsay's description of the Lifeline

Mission demonstrates, there is a need for the practical, even in matters of religion, but it seems that it is only the spectacular and less easily explained miracles that contain the qualities Ramsay is seeking. Although it is true that prayers are answered at the Mission and that Surgeoner's plans for his converts are expressed in noble and idealistic terms, the kind of life that Surgeoner actually leads resembles too closely the kind of poverty-stricken existence endured by Amasa Dempster who earned "$550 per annum" plus "a house, not quite enough fuel, and a ten-per-cent discount on everything bought in a Baptist-owned store - and a few other stores that 'honoured the cloth'" (26). Ramsay has long ago vowed that he wants something better than this, and so, in spite of Surgeoner's talk of miracles, he has no wish to adopt the kind of life chosen by the former tramp.

Although Ramsay cannot accept the various embellishments that have been added to Christianity, neither is he ready to embrace a simplistic view of the Christian faith as an alternative to the interpretations he has encountered. A Child's Book of Saints, from which Dunstable reads to Paul, begins with "a conversation between a little girl [W.V.] and her father" (38). As Ramsay remembers it, the introduction to the book contains the following lines:

> Occasionally these legends brought us to the awful brink of religious controversies and insoluble mysteries, but...W.V....could always fling a bridge of flowers over our abysses. "Our sense,"

> she would declare, "is nothing to God's; and though big people have more sense than children, the sense of all the big people in the world put together would be no sense to His." "We are only little babies to Him; we do not understand Him at all." (38)

Ramsay has occasion to see such simplicity of faith in action when he meets Diana Marfleet. When he tells Diana about the Madonna he saw in the crisis of battle when he was "at the uttermost end of [his] endurance" (16), "she was delighted and immediately gave it a conventionally religious significance, which, quite honestly, had never occurred to [him]" (82). Ramsay states, "Personally I had come to think of little W.V. as rather a little pill, but I now reserved my judgement, for Diana was little W.V. to the life, and I was all for Diana" (82). Once his infatuation with Diana is past, however, Ramsay finds that her simplistic views are not enough to satisfy his new spiritual awareness and curiosity. Of the night he ends his romantic attachment with Diana he says,

> I did not tell Diana that there was the whole question of the little Madonna to be gone into, because I knew that with her conventional Christian background and her generous sentimentality she would begin then and there to explain it for me, and every scrap of intuition I possessed told me that her explanation would be the wrong one. (92)

Rather than advocating a return to ultimate simplicity in religion, Davies seems in Fifth Business to call for a more intensive look at the doctrines and beliefs that are part of a "conventional Christian background" (92). Like

W. O. Mitchell when he has Sammy contemplate the meaning of the word "saved," Davies suggests that some of these concepts have become so much a part of standard Christian thought that they roll effortlessly off a believer's tongue backed by little thought on the part of the speaker about their real significance. For instance, in the Gospel of John Jesus tells Nicodemus, "'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'" (John 3:3). "Born again" is the sort of expression used with ease by preachers like Amasa Dempster and evangelists like Joel Surgeoner and their followers. Jesus was, of course, referring to the spiritual birth that must take place in a person who wishes to begin living the Christian life, but Davies gives the term quite a different connotation. Liesl says that such knowledge as she gives about the total person and the interrelationship between God and the Devil and good and evil is only for "'the twice-born'" (226). Ramsay tells Boy and Eisengrim,

> "A girl renamed me when I had at last broken with my mother. Liesl said it made me one of the twice-born. Had you thought that we are all three of the company of the twice-born? We have all rejected our beginnings and become something our parents could not have foreseen." (262)

By giving the idea of a second birth a different interpretation from that used in Scripture, Davies asks his readers to think about the different ways in which such concepts can be interpreted and thus to grasp the real significance of the beliefs that lie at the heart of Christianity. The easy use

of such expressions as "born again" is one more instance of dry and lifeless religion that is steeped in tradition. Davies is suggesting, perhaps, that believers need to use their intellects in order to examine the beliefs they claim to hold. He has said,

> In too many modern churches there is no emphasis on theology at all. There is a kind of justification by works or by keeping up with modern trends - anything that will drag in a few more people. I think that if the church were more, not uncompromisingly but firmly, theological, it might attract a lot more intellectuals.[24]

In the search for a satisfactory religion, there are also attempts by a number of the characters in Fifth Business to create for themselves gods and religions that will operate for them in terms they can understand. The men of Deptford, for instance, seem to have found their gods in their wives. Ramsay records, "My father...was devoted to my mother, considered her to be a wonderful woman, and would not have done anything to prevent her from manifesting her wonderfulness" (22). The method devised for Dunstable to "beg pardon" (36) after he has angered his mother indicates the elevated status Ramsay's father accords his wife:

> This I had to do on my knees, repeating a formula improvised by my father, which included a pledge that I would always love my mother, to whom I owed the great gift of life, and that I begged her - and secondarily God - to forgive me, knowing full well that I was unworthy of such clemency. (36)

Mr. Ramsay's attitude is mirrored by the other Deptford hus-

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[24]Davies, "A Talk with Tom Harpur" 316.

bands when they refuse to act against their wives' wishes in the matter of Mary Dempster's disgrace. Ramsay says of the service in which Amasa tenders his resignation,

> ...the baker and a few other men were asking [sic] the parson to wait a while, but the majority was against them, especially the women. Not that any of the women spoke; they had done their speaking before church, and their husbands knew the price of peace. So at last the baker and one or two others had to go into the study and tell Amasa Dempster that his resignation was accepted.... There were several men who wanted to do something for him, but the opinion of their wives made it impossible. (49)

Like all attempts to make gods of mere humans, this one is flawed. There is, in effect, a double standard in place in Deptford. The women of whom the men stand in awe are the same wives to whom is attached the shame associated with pregnancy. They must be hidden away during this time and allowed to go for walks, as Mrs. Dempster is, only "after dark and when most people were at supper" (10) because "it was not the custom in [Deptford] for pregnant women to show themselves boldly in the streets" (10). The discomfort Dunstable evidences on seeing Reverend Dempster hold his wife and speak loving words to her is proof of how little affection the men of Deptford lavish on their wives. The women of Deptford are expected to conform to a rigid code of behaviour in which hard work figures prominently. It is the opinion of the residents of the village that

> Amasa Dempster...was plain silly about his wife. His eyes were always on her, and he could be seen drawing pails of water from their outside well, for the washing, when this was fully understood to

> be woman's work, right up to the last month or so of pregnancy. (26)

The standards of conduct for women are so firmly in place that the women themselves are the first to object because Mary Dempster does not seem to take housekeeping very seriously.

Still, the women who live by these imposed standards are, apparently, seen by their men as the source of moral authority. As was the case in Horizon where, Ross implied, the women were a very real governing force, the women of Deptford, while conforming openly to the standards set out for them, have their own ways of demanding obeisance and exerting control over the village. The men's desire to implement Christian principles is not firm enough to cause them to resist the urgings of these women, and their relationship with Christ is not deep enough to take precedence over the relationships established by marriage. Men and women alike abandon the forgiveness and love advocated throughout the Gospels and choose instead to follow a human code of values. Thus, Christian compassion is effectively removed from the village.

Leola also turns from the God about whom she has learned in Deptford to a human god in the person of Boy. Boy creates the rules in their relationship, and Leola accepts these rules as the proper order of things. Ramsay writes that when Boy and Leola are dating, "she hung around Deptford, surrounded by the haze of sanctity that was sup-

posed to envelop an engaged girl, waiting for Boy's occasional weekend visits in the auburn car" (115) while Boy "deceived Leola...with variety and regularity among the free-spirited girls he met in Toronto" (115). For Boy, Leola leaves the church in which she grew up and also tries to remake herself in the image Boy desires. Having observed Leola during the time she is meeting Boy at prescribed intervals while he tours with the Prince of Wales, Ramsay says,

> She had learned to curtsy very prettily...and eat without seeming to chew, and do other courtier-like things required by Boy. I am sure that for her the Prince was nothing more than an excuse for Boy's brilliant appearances. Never have I seen a woman so absorbed in her love for a man.... (127)

Like all the human gods in the novels under consideration here, Leola's god fails her completely. He is unable to give her the unconditional acceptance, the love, or the fidelity ascribed to the Christ of the Gospels. Boy continually campaigns to improve Leola. Having failed, however, to change her sufficiently to satisfy himself, Boy, in effect, leaves her, and Leola becomes one of "the walking wounded in the battle of life" (189).

Boy Staunton also adopts gods and values that are in opposition to the strict religious code taught in Deptford. For example, he replaces what Ramsay calls the "prudent Canadian Scots" (206) ways with an obsession with wealth and prestige. Samuel Macey writes, "Boy Staunton appears to

have attained the Canadian Protestant dream...."[25] Inheriting the sugar empire of his father, Boy goes on to make a fortune in bread, and as his wealth increases, it begins to dominate him, even dictating his choice of friends. Ramsay says of Boy and his acquaintances, "They were a strange lot, these moneyed, influential friends of Boy's, but they were obviously interesting to each other" (167).

Boy's love of wealth is equalled by a love of power and prestige that leads him to make a god of Edward, Prince of Wales. The Prince is, however, a poor object of adoration. Contrary to Boy's expectations, Edward decides to abdicate, and as Ramsay notes, this decision thrusts Boy into despair:

> I was not with him when he heard the sad broadcast of Abdication on 11 December, but I looked in at his house that evening and found him, for the only time in his life, to my knowledge, very drunk and alternating between tears and dreadful tirades against all the repressive forces that worked against true love and the expression of a man's real self. (186-87)

Ramsay describes Boy "trudging through the snow, deep in some egotistical hell of his own" (186-87).

Boy's desire to serve the god of social prestige leads him to make a bid for a political career even though, as Eisengrim tells him, "'people are suspicious of a public figure who wants to be loved'" (262). The god Boy has cho-

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[25]Samuel L. Macey, "Time, Clockwork, and the Devil in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy," Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy, ed. Robert G. Lawrence and Samuel L. Macey, ELS Monograph Series 20 (Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, 1980) 40.

sen again lets him down. He eventually succeeds in being appointed Lieutenant-Governor, but his position cannot protect him from his past and from the revenge of Paul Dempster.

Boy's lust is another of the gods to which he bows. Beginning with Mabel Heighington, Boy demonstrates an insatiable desire for sex and for the women who can offer it. Ramsay refers to Boy's "rough-and-tumble sexual affairs" (118). Again, however, this god leads Boy to unhappiness. After Leola's death, which is hastened by Boy's continuous need for extramarital affairs, Boy's love of women leads him to fall prey to Denyse Hornick, who has her own gods, "her unswerving devotion to [Boy's] interests" (236) and "her business [that] was her creation and demanded the best of her" (237). Denyse continually pushes Boy up the social ladder, but such pressure exacts a high price. Boy tells Ramsay,

> "I feel rotten. I've done just about everything I've ever planned to do, and everybody thinks I'm a success. And of course I have Denyse now to keep me up to the mark, which is lucky - damned lucky, and don't imagine I don't feel it. But sometimes I wish I could get into a car and drive away from the whole damned thing." (242)

Denyse also costs Boy his oldest, and possibly his most honest, friend. Because of her war against "the things of the spirit" (240), she is antagonistic toward Dunstan Ramsay, lover of saints. Ramsay states, "So, although I was asked to dinner now and then, when the other guests were people

who had to be worked off for some tiresome reason, I was no longer an intimate of the household" (241).

Ramsay says of Boy, "...to him the reality of life lay in external things, whereas for me the only reality was of the spirit..." (114). Boy's attitude toward the spiritual is summed up in his description of the saints:

> "Religion in the school is one thing; there is a well-understood place for religion in education. But not this misty world of wonder-workers and holy wizards and juiceless women. Saints aren't in the picture at all." (196)

As Nancy Bjerring observes, "[Boy] defines his total self in terms of his material self."[26]

To help achieve his aims, Boy resorts to what Ramsay calls "secularized, self-seeking prayer, without the human dignity that even the most modest prayer evokes" (155). He subjects both himself and Leola to the ideas of Dr. Emile Coué, an authority on auto-suggestion. According to the pamphlet on "Couéism" (155) that Boy reads, men and women can discover the secret of success by repeatedly saying, "'Every day in every way, I am getting better and better'" (154). Such repetition is supposed to foster "'moral energy'" (154), and even, one might say, to make a person his or her own saviour. When, however, Boy encourages this kind of "prayer" in Leola, it is doomed to failure. As Ramsay observes, "...like all attempts to command success

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[26]Nancy E. Bjerring, "Deep in the Old Man's Puzzle," Canadian Literature 62 (Autumn 1974): 56.

for the chronically unsuccessful, it petered out" (155). Once again, an alternate source of spiritual strength proves to be disappointing.

Boy's movement away from the religious codes of Deptford culminates in his attempt to do away with any idea of a supreme God and an effort to usurp that position himself. Ramsay points out Boy's folly in this area when he tells Boy, "'You created a God in your own image, and when you found out he was no good you abolished him. It's a quite common form of psychological suicide'" (241). Later, Ramsay adds,

> "I told you once you'd made a God of yourself, and the insufficiency of it forced you to become an atheist. It's time you tried to be a human being. Then maybe something bigger than yourself will come up on your horizon." (264)

Wilfred Cude notes that "Solipsism is a barren doctrine...a doctrine that can lead only to despair and madness."[27]

Boy is not the only character in Fifth Business who attempts to usurp the role of God. As was the case in As For Me and My House and, to a lesser extent, in A Jest of God, the theme of creating in one's own image is an important one in this novel, and several characters believe that they possess the creative powers of the Deity. It has already been noted that Ramsay's mother attempts to make him conform to her standards and to force him to love her on her

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[27]Wilfred Cude, "Historiography and Those Damned Saints: Shadow and Light in Fifth Business," Journal of Canadian Studies 12.1 (Feb. 1977): 64.

own terms. Ramsay also comments that both Diana Marfleet, his nurse, and the doctor in the English hospital where he wakes up take credit for remaking him. Of Diana he says,

> But I could not be blind to the fact that she regarded me as her own creation. And why not? Hadn't she fed me and washed me and lured me back into this world when I was far away? Didn't she teach me to walk, showing the greatest patience when I was most clumsy? Was she not anxious to retrain me about habits of eating and behaviour? (88)

Abou ·.: doctor he makes the following observation:

> He seemed greatly elated, especially when I was able to remember my Army number....The red-faced man [the doctor] was some sort of specialist in shell-shock cases, and I was one of his successes, though I rather think I cured myself, or the little Madonna cured me, or some agencies other than good nursing and medical observation. (79)

As in the other texts that have been considered, however, such creation proves to be beyond human capability. The whipping and the tantrums that Fiona Ramsay uses to try to mold Dunstable into the image she wants for him do not have the desired effect. Instead, Dunstable enlists in the army and forms such a resentment against the woman who tried to make him her own that he can say about her death, "I was ashamed because I felt the loss so little" (81) and "I was mean-spiritedly pleased that my mother had not lived to hear of my V.C." (81). When Diana tries to fashion Ramsay into the lover and husband she desires, Ramsay recognizes

> that she was too much a mother to me, and as I had had one mother, and lost her, I was not in a hurry to acquire another....If I could manage it, I had no intention of being anybody's own dear laddie,

ever again. (88)

Ramsay also refuses to acknowledge the doctor's power over him, preferring rather to believe in the supernatural power of the little Madonna or in his own capabilities for self-healing. Ramsay's reactions to the attempts to mold him merely confirm the point illustrated so dramatically by Boy's utterly failed efforts to remake Leola: creation is not a talent given to men and women and is best left in God's hands.

Ramsay's statement, "I rather think I cured myself" (79), suggests that he has begun to believe that he, too, can create, or at least recreate, himself. Thus, he joins the list of would-be creators in the novel. Padre Blazon and Liesl both accuse Ramsay of playing God with the lives of those about him. Blazon counsels Ramsay with regard to Mary Dempster, "'...stop trying to be God, making it up to her that you are sane and she is mad'" (177). Liesl also points out that Ramsay has been playing God and reproaches him for "watching life from the sidelines and knowing where all the players go wrong" (222). She tells him, "'You make yourself responsible for other people's troubles. It is your hobby'" (225). As Liesl points out, however, Ramsay has paid dearly for attempting to play such a role:

> "...there is a whole great piece of your life that is unlived, denied, set aside. That is why at fifty you can't bear it any longer and fly all to pieces and pour out your heart to the first really intelligent woman you have met...and get into a schoolboy yearning for a girl who is as far from

> you as if she lived on the moon. This is the revenge of the unlived life, Ramsay. Suddenly it makes a fool of you." (226)

Whereas Boy substitutes the gods of wealth, prestige, and lust for the God of Deptford, Paul, alias Magnus Eisengrim, replaces the God of the village and of his father with darker powers. Illusion and sleight of hand become his masters. In response to Amasa Dempster's overzealous employment of his religion, Amasa's son grows to worship the very things that the Reverend Dempster condemns so heartily as part of the Devil's "black slime" (41). Paul claims that his "miracles have a spice of the Devil about them" (262). In fact, he has allied himself so completely with the Devil's camp that it is no surprise when he is revealed as Mephistopheles in his Dr. Faustus sketch. Here is, one might say, Dunstable's God of retribution at work bringing about revenge for the accusations Amasa once levelled against the young Ramsay. It is, however, important to keep in mind the fact that Davies does not ally himself with Amasa in this novel and that their views of Paul's way of life do not correspond. This will be evident when Davies' system of religious thought is discussed. Nevertheless, as far as Amasa's Christian beliefs are concerned, the way of life Paul has chosen makes the revenge Ramsay wished on the Reverend Dempster complete, had the minister but lived to see it.

Paul, alias Magnus Eisengrim, admits that "'One always

learns one's mystery at the price of one's innocence...'" (259). In choosing to serve the gods he has, however, Paul has lost other qualities as well. As mentioned previously, the result of his father's insistence that he feel guilt has been Paul's complete inability to experience this emotion. Looking at the effects of a sense of guilt on the citizens of Deptford, one might be tempted to consider Paul fortunate indeed. As stated earlier, however, the loss of the ability to feel guilt has also cost Paul the ability to make moral judgements. In addition to rejecting those things that were wrong with Deptford's way of thinking, he has, like Boy, also rejected the "virtue, dignity, and...nobility" (16) that Ramsay recognizes were present there as well. When Ramsay first encounters Paul in his role as Faustus Legrand, he makes the unfortunate discovery that Paul has not only become a conjurer, he has also become a thief. It is true that Paul returns Ramsay's pocket-book at a later date, but the fact that he has stolen it at all, and from an old friend, casts serious doubts on his honesty and even his idea of loyalty. Once Paul has assumed the persona of Magnus Eisengrim, it seems apparent that compassion and the ability to relate to other human beings have been replaced by pride and self-satisfaction. Remembering the bond that existed between Paul and Ramsay in Deptford, readers may be a little surprised at the air of aloofness that marks Paul in his role as Magnus. Paul has, in effect, sacrificed much

of his basic humanity to his stage personality. Illusion and the deception it involves have become everything to him. He explains his rationale to Ramsay:

> "But it [the illusion he and his associates maintain for the audience] won't work if we let ourselves be pawed and patronized and petted by the people who have marvelled. Hence our plan....That the show must keep its character all the time. I must not be seen off the stage except under circumstances that carry some cachet; I must never do tricks outside the theatre. When people meet me I must always be a distinguished gentleman conferring a distinction; not a nice fellow, just like the rest of the boys. The girls must have it in their contract that they do not accept invitations unless we approve, appear anywhere except in clothes we approve, get into any messes with boy friends, or seem to be anything but ladies. Not easy, you see." (208)

Commenting on Eisengrim's relationship with Faustina, Ramsay says,

> ...it was clear enough to me that his compelling love affair was with himself....I had seen a good deal of egotism in my life, and I knew that it starved love for anyone else and sometimes burned it out completely. (220)

Ramsay's remark is made during the time that he is infatuated with Faustina, and, because she shares a room with Eisengrim, one might be tempted to dismiss his words as mere spite. The fact that Ramsay sees Faustina and Liesl in a lesbian embrace may, however, give some credence to Ramsay's claim. It seems that Faustina does not find her relationship with Eisengrim a satisfying one, and the reason for this could well be that suggested by Ramsay. Paul has, it seems, turned away from the very kind of loving, human interaction that once saved his life. It is significant

that Paul remembers Ramsay's parents only as "'Hard people - especially your mother'" (262) and is "disconcerted" when Ramsay tells him "how [his] mother had worked and schemed and devised a nest to keep him alive, and exulted when he decided to live" (262). Paul remembers the persecutions that were all too evident in Deptford, but he knows nothing about the "virtue, dignity, and...nobility" that Ramsay recalls. It is obvious that Paul has lacked a model that could help him form a personality and a set of values in which the concepts of love and gentleness are present.

The new name Paul has taken for himself is evidence of the character traits he has chosen to adopt. It is, in fact, associated with what has been in legend and story one of the most feared members of the animal kingdom. Paul tells Boy,

> "It [Paul's new name] comes from one of the great northern beast fables, and it means Wolf. Far from being a disadvantage, people like it. People like to be in awe of something, you know." (261)

Without a moral sense to trouble him, Paul is frighteningly like the popular conception of his namesake when it comes to repaying wrongs done to him. Thus, he can readily assume the role of avenger when he meets Boy Staunton and realizes that this man is "'the Rich Young Ruler'" (261) who was responsible for much of the Dempster family's misery. The repayment of evil with evil is the law governing Paul in his role as Magnus Eisengrim. Perhaps he is acting in response to basic animal instincts; perhaps he continues to remember

the God of vengeance with whom his father must surely have acquainted him; whichever surmise is correct, it is certain that the forgiveness stressed in Scripture has been as completely erased from Paul's character as has the guilt once forced on him by his father. Davies does not seem to condemn Paul for the gods and the values he has chosen. For Paul, son of Deptford's "'hoor'" (260), the system of religious thought that was firmly in place in Deptford has become intolerable. Christianity, as it was presented to him in his native village, has failed him completely, and the upright citizens of Deptford have wounded Mary Dempster's son too deeply for healing. Paul's only recourse has been to look for a code of action and values that is completely opposite to that on which he was raised. His choices would certainly shock the residents of Deptford, but they are perhaps less to be condemned than the cruelty that has been aimed against Paul and his mother in the name of Christ and morality.

Ramsay is the only one of the chief characters who, in moving away from the stern version of Christianity adhered to in Deptford, does not move away from Christianity as a whole. One might contend that Ramsay, like his counterparts, does adopt a false god in the person of Mary Dempster. After all, he does devote the better part of his life to his quest to determine whether or not Mary is really a saint. Considered as Ramsay's god, Mary would indeed be

disappointing. She ends her life as a madwoman who must constantly be kept under restraint in a sanatorium, and Ramsay is unable to find support for any of his claims about her holiness. When Ramsay comes to pay his last respects to Mary as she lies in her coffin, he finds that no odour of violets surrounds her as he has heard it should if she were a real saint. It is not as a god, however, but as a guide that Mary chiefly functions in Ramsay's life. Ramsay's fascination with Mary does not take him away from the concept of God and faith. Rather, it leads him to explore more fully these subjects and all their implications. Judith Skelton Grant writes that Ramsay's relationship with Mary "lead[s] him to experience manifestations of God, and to spend his life contemplating evidences of the Divine on earth."[28] Because he is determined to find the Madonna who appeared to him with Mary's face during the war, Ramsay develops an interest in religious art, and this interest has a side effect that Ramsay explains in the following way:

> ...when I had got past telling myself that I was feeding a splendid new enthusiasm for religious art and architecture I knew that I was rediscovering religion as well. Do not suppose I was becoming "religious"; the Presbyterianism of my childhood effectively insulated me against any enthusiastic abandonment to faith. But I became aware that in matters of religion I was an illiterate, and illiteracy was my abhorrence. I was not such a fool or an aesthete as to suppose that all this art was for art's sake alone. It was about something, and I wanted to know what that something

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[28]Judith Skelton Grant, Robertson Davies, Canadian Writers 17 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978) 48.

was. (124)

Even before he witnesses what he believes to be Mary's miracles, Ramsay notes that there is a difference between the kind of religion that seems to be an innate part of Mrs. Dempster's life and the patterns of thought and belief that are accepted as religion by most of the residents of Deptford. Ramsay describes Mary as wearing "a sweet but woefully un-Deptford expression" (44), and of his secret visits to Mrs. Dempster after her disgrace in the gravel pit he says,

> ...it was not long before I found that she was doing much for me. I do not know how to express it, but she was a wise woman, and...she seemed to me to have a breadth of outlook and a clarity of vision that were strange and wonderful...and I recognize now that it was her lack of fear, of apprehension, of assumption that whatever happened was inevitably going to lead to some worse state of affairs, that astonished and enriched me....
>
> It would be false to suggest that there was anything philosophical in her attitude. Rather, it was religious, and it was impossible to talk to her for long without being aware that she was wholly religious. I do not say "deeply religious" because that was what people said about her husband, and apparently they meant that he imposed religion as he understood it on everything he knew or encountered. But she, tied up in a rotten little house without a friend except me, seemed to live in a world of trust that had nothing of the stricken, lifeless, unreal quality of religion about it....She lived by a light that arose from within.... (52)

Ramsay not only sees in Mary a window into another world that is quite separate from drab, matter-of-fact Deptford, he also senses in her a relationship with God that goes beyond that promoted by the Deptford faithful, clergy and

laypersons alike. As Padre Blazon says of Mary, "'...she must have been an extraordinary person, a great lover of God, and trusting greatly in His love for her'" (248). Mary's quiet, yet all-pervasive trust in God is, as Ramsay notes, in opposition to her husband's concept of soul-winning, and it is also in direct contrast to the ill-considered kind of prayer in which Amasa indulges at Mary's bedside, the sort of prayer that causes Mrs. Ramsay to say, "'And Amasa Dempster just won't believe that there's a time to talk about God and a time to trust God and keep your mouth shut'" (24). Amasa devotes his life to living and promoting his faith; for Mary, her faith is, quite simply, her life.

It is Mrs. Dempster who plays the chief role in leading Ramsay into the world of the miraculous. With her miracles, unconfirmed though they may be, and her appearance of living in "a world that saw things her way" (52), Mary offers Ramsay something of the quality found in the _Arabian Nights_ and the book of _Revelation_, a quality for which he has hungered most of his life. Remembering his childhood, Ramsay observes,

> As for the stories about saints, they were tales of wonders, like _Arabian Nights_, and when the Reverend Andrew Bowyer bade all us Presbyterians to prepare ourselves for the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, it seemed to me that _Arabian Nights_ and the _Bible_ were getting pretty close - and I did not mean this in any scoffing sense. (43)

About his burgeoning interest in saints and their legends,

Ramsay reports,

> What I learned merely revived and confirmed my childhood notion that religion was much nearer in spirit to the Arabian Nights than it was to anything encouraged by St James' Presbyterian Church. (124-25)

The harsh codes of Deptford tend to deaden its people and crush their desire for what Liesl calls "'big spiritual adventures'" (218), but Ramsay says of Mary, "I regarded ...the secret league between us as the tap-root that fed my life" (53). Ronald Sutherland notes,

> ...just as Mrs. Ramsay saved Paul, Mary Dempster saves Dunstan, although in quite a different manner. What Mary saves Dunstan from is the dull, plodding, guilt-ridden, self-effacing role of the typical Calvinist-Jansenist-conditioned character in Canadian fiction. Through her, indirectly, he discovers the mystery and magic of life....[29]

For Paul, who only knew Mary as a person called "'hoor'" (260), his search for something beyond the Deptford scheme of things ends simply in a fascination with magic and illusion for their own sakes. For Ramsay, who has known Mary Dempster's own peculiar brand of goodness, his search for something more becomes an attempt to find religious truth and to include in his world those deeper things of God that are past human understanding.

In his search to verify Mary's miracles and to find the source of the inner light he has sensed in her, Ramsay receives little help from the staunch Presbyterians of Deptford. He reports that the Reverend Donald Phelps

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[29]Sutherland 77.

> took me on and advised me that it was blasphemous to think that anyone - even someone of unimpeachable character - could restore the dead to life. The age of miracles was past, said he, and I got the impression that he was heartily glad of it. (63)

According to Phelps, belief in miracles is not only foolish and queer, a view shared by Deptford's Dr. McCausland, it is actually a sin. Like many of the characters in the other novels considered in this thesis, the Reverend Mr. Phelps is a man "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Tim. 3:5).

Ramsay's search for spiritual truth makes it necessary for him to cross the denominational barrier between Protestants and Roman Catholics that is firmly observed in Deptford. Having found the Presbyterians unresponsive to his claim about Mary, Ramsay turns to the village priest, Father Regan, for answers. The priest, however, merely cautions Ramsay about the "'spiritual dangers you Protestants don't even seem to know exist'" (138) and acquaints him with the concept of "'a fool-saint'" (139), an idea Ramsay is not ready to accept with regard to Mrs. Dempster and her miracles.

Father Regan attempts to connect Ramsay's search for miracles and saints with a search for a new denomination. He tells Ramsay,

> "Now, you tell me you're very interested in saints. Awright, I'm not fishing for converts, but if that's the way it is you'd better take a good look at the religion saints come from. And when you've looked, I'll betcha a dollar you'll

> draw back like a man from a flame. You clever, imaginative fellas often want to flirt with Mother Church, but she's no flirty lady, I'm telling you. You like the romance, but you can't bear the yoke." (138)

Regan adds,

> "...there's only one Church that undertakes to cut right down to the bone and say what's a miracle and what isn't and who's a saint and who isn't, and you, and this poor soul you speak of, are outside it." (138)

Ramsay is not, however, searching for a new denomination with its doctrinal dictates and its narrow interpretations of Scripture. He scoffs at the idea put forward by some of his colleagues that because of his association with the Bollandists and his interest in saints he may be "'going over to Rome'" (165), and once he has secured the guardianship of Mary, he notes, "Now I should be able to see what a saint was really like and perhaps make a study of one without all the apparatus of Rome" (161). Ramsay says of his first book, "I avoided [both] the Catholic gush and the Protestant smirk" (181).

When Ramsay becomes allied with the Bollandists, he finds that interest in the saints and the mysteries surrounding them is a common ground on which he and these Jesuit scholars can meet. It seems that such a study of the inexplicable transcends denominational lines and concerns. Michael Peterman comments that Ramsay searches for "answers to the question of what religion is 'about' rather than what

the adherents of a specific religion believe."[30] There is, it seems, a part of Christianity that is outside the trivial and mundane limits and boundaries imposed by religious doctrines, and Fifth Business contains the suggestion that what cannot be contained by human thought and prejudice constitutes perhaps the most important aspect of the Christian faith.

Through his fascination with saints and their miracles, Ramsay discovers that awe and wonder are the aspects that are missing from the religion of Deptford, and that these are the qualities for which he has been looking. Eisengrim points out that awe and wonder have, in fact, been denied in all of modern life and that it is not only Ramsay who has felt their loss:

> "...there is always another mood, one precisely contrary to what seems to be the fashion. Nowadays this concealed longing is for romance and marvels....People want to marvel at something, and the whole spirit of our time is not to let them do it. They will pay to do it, if you make it good and marvellous for them....What we offer is innocent - just an entertainment in which a hungry part of the spirit is fed." (207-08)

Both Ramsay and Eisengrim are involved in offering the miraculous to a public that is "'hungry'" for manifestations of power and mystery. Ramsay, however, chooses to present the miraculous from a godly perspective, writing books about the saints and giving God credit for marvelous intervention in the lives of men and women. Eisengrim, on the other

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[30]Peterman 117.

hand, presents miracles with a suggestion of evil and darker forces about them. In Eisengrim's act is the mystery warned about in Scripture.

Eisengrim makes a veiled reference to the miracles of Christ when he introduces his show:

> He [Eisengrim]...promised us an evening of such visions and illusions as had nourished the imagination of mankind for two thousand years [the rough designation usually used to refer to the time between the first century when Jesus was on earth and the twentieth century].... (201)

The clergy of Deptford seem to have forgotten that a large part of Christ's ministry involved the miraculous, and it takes a conjurer who has severed all connections with the Church and with the Gospel to point out that Christ's ministry did involve the mysterious and the inexplicable. The sinister Eisengrim also points out another important spiritual truth. If miracles are denied in the churches, people will seek them wherever they can find them, even if it means allying themselves with the powers of darkness. Readers may be reminded of the assertion made by Paul Kirby in <u>As For Me and My House</u> that

> "Man can't bear to admit his insignificance....it was...helplessness in the beginning that set him discovering gods who could control the storms and seasons. Powerful, friendly gods - on his side. And if they were more powerful than the storms, and if they were concerned with him above all things, then it followed that he was really more powerful and important than the storms, too."[31]

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[31]Sinclair Ross, <u>As For Me and My House</u> (1941; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) 19.

Fifth Business also contains the assertion that humankind longs for power and miracles that will help them to control and manage their existence. Eisengrim insists that men and women will be drawn to the miraculous, no matter how it is presented, because the longing for miracles is an intrinsic part of human nature and must be satisfied.

Michael Peterman epitomizes the spiritual aspect of Deptford when he speaks of "a fictional world in which zealous puritan values, untinctured by self-knowledge, let loose the forces of disorder." He adds, "Such disorder is resolved only by recognition among the special few of the powerful, unseen world."[32] That Ramsay early realizes the importance of Christian wonder in his own life is evident when he says of the Testament he reads during the war,

> ...long passages of it confirmed my early impression that religion and Arabian Nights were true in the same way....I think Revelation was my favourite book; the Gospels seemed less relevant to me then than John's visions of the beasts and the struggle of the Crowned Woman, who had the moon beneath her feet, with the great Red Dragon. (71)

Christianity that does not include the God and the world of Revelation cannot, it seems, satisfy Ramsay, nor can it satisfy Davies. Ralph Heintzman writes,

> A world of wonder unchecked by reason degenerates into superstition and terror: it is,...as Davies and Liesl agree, cruel, cruel, cruel. But it is equally true that a rational world from which reverence and wonder have been banished has lost contact with the source of its own being and must suffer the consequences, one of which is the

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[32]Peterman 117.

> withering of reason itself. That is why both Plato and Aristotle were careful to insist that all philosophy begins in wonder. So does morality and social order. "Goodness," as Auden has written, "is rooted in wonder, awe, and reverence for the beauty and strangeness of creation. Wonder itself is not goodness...but it is the only or the most favourable soil in which goodness can grow."[33]

Whether Mary's miracles are real or not, and, as Wilfred Cude points out, "The ambiguous texture of the underlying evidence suggests that Davies would not deny us that option [of believing in them],"[34] it is certain that Ramsay's belief in them leads him deeper and deeper into the realm of the miraculous. Padre Blazon teaches Ramsay that his failure to find corroboration for his claims that Mary is a saint who has actually performed miracles is unimportant. What is important is not to become, like the religious folk of Deptford, dogmatic about his beliefs but to take from his experiences all they offer to enrich his life. Blazon tells Ramsay,

> "What good would it do you if I told you she [Mary] is indeed a saint?...If you think her a saint, she is a saint to you....That is what we call the reality of the soul; you are foolish to demand the agreement of the world as well." (174)

Later, Blazon concludes,

> "As for the miracles, you and I have looked too deeply into miracles to dogmatize; you believe in them, and your belief has coloured your life with beauty and goodness; too much scientizing will not

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[33]Ralph Heintzman, "The Virtues of Reverence," Journal of Canadian Studies 12.1 (Feb. 1977): 94.

[34]Cude 65.

> help you. It seems far more important to me that her life was lived heroically; she endured a hard fate, did the best she could, and kept it up until at last her madness was too powerful for her. Heroism in God's cause is the mark of the saint, Ramezay, not conjuring tricks. So on All Saints' Day I do not think you will do anything but good by honouring the name of Mary Dempster in your prayers." (249)

Ronald Sutherland notes,

> What Dunstan eventually realizes...is that it is not so much whether actual miracles have occurred or not, but the capacity to believe that they might have which is important. In other words, to allow life the extra dimension of mystery and magic is to liberate the spirit and imagination, which can be smothered and destroyed by unmitigated reality. They can also be smothered by Calvinistic doctrine, which stultifies faith by assigning it a strictly limited function, thereby fossilizing the mysteries.[35]

The fact the Ramsay's life has, as Padre Blazon points out, "'been illuminated'" (249) by Mary is miracle enough in a village like Deptford that has the capacity to make Ramsay, as Liesl says, "'a moral monster'" (217).

Padre Blazon introduces Ramsay to the idea that Mary may have been designated by God to bear the snowball's blow in place of Ramsay. He tells his companion, "'Perhaps that was what she was for, Ramezay. She saved you on the battle-field, you say. But did she not also save you when she took the blow that was meant for you?'" (177). Blazon pleads, "'...get on with your own life and accept the possibility that it may be purchased at the price of hers and that this may be God's plan for you and her'" (177). Sensing that

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[35]Sutherland 79.

Ramsay is shocked with the idea that Mary may have been sacrificed for him, Blazon attempts to clarify God's ways by introducing an idea he attributes to Einstein, "'"God is subtle, but He is not cruel"'" (177). He tells Ramsay,

> "There is some sound Jewish wisdom for your muddled Protestant mind. Try to understand the subtlety, and stop whimpering about the cruelty. Maybe God wants you for something special. Maybe so much that you are worth a woman's sanity." (177-78)

Here, in miniature, is the inexplicable concept, evident as well in As For Me and My House, on which the Christian Gospel is based, that humankind is worth the sacrifice of a Saviour. As was the case with Judith West in As For Me and My House, Mary, the saviour in Fifth Business, has not, like Christ, been sacrificed in perfection. Her adultery and her madness make her a flawed agent of salvation. But then, she has only been required to save one man, not, as was the perfect Christ, to save all humankind. Blazon does not make a dogmatic statement about Mary's role in Ramsay's life. Like so many of the other issues raised in this book, it is only an idea for both Ramsay and readers to consider. By introducing such a concept, however, Blazon does suggest that it is impossible for humans to comprehend God's methods of action and, thus, that both inordinate guilt and blame of God are useless, a conclusion similar to that reached by Rachel in A Jest of God. It is necessary, according to Blazon, to accept God's will and ways in faith.

Ramsay's relationship with Mary leads him, in fact,

into an exploration of this quality as well. Faith, which the apostle Paul describes as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1) is not, one might assume, high on the scale of things valued in pragmatic Deptford. It is faith, however, that causes Ramsay to accept the view that Mary is responsible for the three miracles he ascribes to her, and faith keeps him searching for proof of Mary's sainthood. The importance Ramsay has learned to ascribe to this attribute is evident when he describes his observations of the petitioners at the basilica at Guadalupe:

> My eyes were on the kneeling petitioners, whose faces had the beauty virtually every face reveals in the presence of the goddess of mercy, the Holy Mother, the figure of divine compassion. Very different, these, from the quinnying, lip-biting, calculating faces of the art lovers one sees looking at Madonnas in galleries. These petitioners had no conception of art; to them a picture was a symbol of something else, and very readily the symbol became the reality. They were untouched by modern education, but their government was striving with might and main to procure this inestimable benefit for them; anticlericalism and American bustle would soon free them from belief in miracles and holy likenesses. But where, I ask myself, will mercy and divine compassion come from then? Or are such things necessary to people who are well fed and know the wonders concealed in an atom? I don't regret economic and educational advance; I just wonder how much we shall have to pay for it, and in what coin. (199)

So intrigued is Ramsay with the subject of religious belief that he attempts to write "a sort of prologue to a discussion of the nature of faith" (199). Not only does he ask questions about the possible price that loss of faith can

exact, he also asks why and how faith exists:

> Why do people all over the world, and at all times, want marvels that defy all verifiable facts? And are the marvels brought into being by their desire, or is their desire an assurance rising from some deep knowledge, not to be directly experienced and questioned, that the marvelous is indeed an aspect of the real? (199)

Ramsay, who admits that he is not "conventionally devout" (199), does not want to give a sentimentally religious explanation of the phenomenon, but neither does he want to attempt a cold and sceptical scientific dissection of those things so important to believers like the Guadalupe pilgrims. He states, "I was trying to get at the subject without wearing either the pink spectacles of faith or the green spectacles of science" (200). As happens when he attempts to grasp the truth about miracles and the plans and will of God, however, Ramsay must admit that this is one more aspect of religion that must be simply accepted, not completely understood:

> All I had managed by the time I found myself sitting in the basilica of Guadalupe was a certainty that faith was a psychological reality, and that where it was not invited to fasten itself on things unseen, it invaded and raised bloody hell with things seen. Or in other words, the irrational will have its say, perhaps because "irrational" is the wrong word for it. (200)

What Eisengrim asserts about miracles, Ramsay learns to apply to the subject of faith as well. People will flock to exercise their faith, and if they are denied the opportunity to do this in places of God, then they will do it in places where demons hold sway.

Whereas Boy seeks a religion in which faith, other than in oneself, is unnecessary, Ramsay seeks a religion with faith in "things unseen" at its very core. Such a religion can transcend the everyday world, and it is this transcendence for which Ramsay looks. Only in its presence can Mary Dempster's miracles be accepted at face value.

Finally, Mary leads Ramsay closer to God, whoever Ramsay understands Him to be. When he goes to see Mrs. Dempster in her coffin, Ramsay finds himself kneeling beside her body and praying:

> I prayed for the repose of the soul of Mary Dempster, somewhere and somehow unspecified, under the benevolence of some power unidentified but deeply felt. It was the sort of prayer that supported all the arguments of Denyse Staunton against religion, but I was in the grip of an impulsion that it would have been spiritual suicide to deny. (245)

Kneeling beside Mary, Ramsay senses the reality of that unseen world he has attempted to explore. Its force is so strong that Ramsay must either acknowledge its reality or give up forever his belief in the vital, mysterious aspects of Christianity, the search for which has dominated his life. Like the little Madonna who led Ramsay to a place of healing and rest, Mary leads him away from Deptford and its confining concepts of Christianity to a spiritual state of awe and faith and communion with his God.

Just as Blazon, Ramsay, and Davies with them, are against the abandonment of belief in the miraculous and see

such belief as an important part of the Christian heritage, so they are also against some other kinds of omissions that have often been made by various believers. In the same way that Sinclair Ross suggested that fragmentation can lead to misunderstandings about the true nature of Christianity, Davies suggests that omissions in one's concept of theology can contribute to a false and often harmful interpretation of the Christian faith.

An important theme in Fifth Business is the reintegration of religion in all its aspects, and Davies uses Padre Blazon as an advocate of this kind of wholeness. Whereas the Reverend Donald Phelps of Deptford is willing to abandon miracles and the awe and wonder associated with them, Padre Blazon sees the miraculous in all things. God's power is, he feels, too great to be confined by narrow doctrinal and dispensational definitions. He tells Ramsay,

> "Oh, miracles! They happen everywhere....Life itself it [sic] too great a miracle for us to make so much fuss about potty little reversals of what we pompously assume to be the natural order." (174)

Padre Blazon also calls for a rejoining of spirit and body, a concept of totality that is foreign to many representatives of Christianity:

> "I am deep in the old man's puzzle, trying to link the wisdom of the body with the wisdom of the spirit until the two are one. At my age you cannot divide spirit from body without anguish and destruction, from which you will speak nothing but crazy lies!" (178)

Blazon explains to Ramsay,

> "I think when He [Christ] comes again it will be to declare the unity of the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit. And then perhaps we shall make some sense of this life of marvels, cruel circumstances, obscenities, and commonplaces. Who can tell? - we might even make it bearable for everybody." (177)

It seems that Blazon may be making a comment on the unbearable conditions and circumstances that have, through the centuries, been imposed on humankind by religious groups who insist on separations never intended in Scripture. Attempted separation of the body and spirit leads, for instance, to the horror of all things sexual that is experienced by the residents of Deptford.

Padre Blazon also applies the idea of totality to his concept of God:

> "My own idea is that when He [Christ] comes again it will be to continue his [sic] ministry as an old man. I am an old man and my life has been spent as a soldier of Christ, and I tell you that the older I grow the less Christ's teaching says to me....Everybody wants a Christ for himself and those who think like him. Very well, am I at fault for wanting a Christ who will show me how to be an old man? All Christ's teaching is put forward with the dogmatism, the certainty, and the strength of youth: I need something that takes account of the accretion of experience, the sense of paradox and ambiguity that comes with years! I think after forty we should recognize Christ politely but turn for our comfort and guidance to God the Father, who knows the good and evil of life, and to the Holy Ghost, who possesses a wisdom beyond that of the incarnated Christ. After all, we worship a Trinity, of which Christ is but one Person." (176-77)

Although Blazon is fairly conventional in his interpretation of the roles of the Members of the Trinity, he is, according to commonly-accepted Christian thought, little less than

blasphemous when he suggests that Christ, the Son of God and Saviour of the world, has deficiencies and is unable to meet the needs of the aged. Blazon's call for recognition of all aspects of the Trinity may well constitute a criticism by Davies of the way in which many modern adherents of Christianity have accepted only a concept of God that they can understand. Just as the Reverend George Leadbeater and Boy Staunton reduce Christ to a wealthy capitalist, a man similar to themselves, many Christian denominations dwell on the Christ aspect of the Trinity because God in human form is easiest to comprehend. Blazon encourages a return to the idea of God as a Deity who inexplicably takes different forms in order to meet the various needs of His creation. Padre Blazon recognizes that the God aspect of the Trinity is not merely an Agent of wrath. This is clear in his statement to Ramsay that "'"God is subtle, but He is not cruel"'" (177). In point of fact, unwillingness to draw a clear-cut distinction between an invisible and often inexplicable God and the Christ who took on human form seems to be in keeping with Jesus' own words when he said, "'He who has seen Me has seen the Father'" and added,

> "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works." (John 14:9-10)

In the fictional world created by Davies there is room for an impersonal as well as a personal conception of the Deity. There is room for vengeance and retribution, as Paul

Dempster proves, but there is also a need for love and forgiveness, as is illustrated by the villagers' treatment of Mary Dempster. With Davies, it is not a matter of choosing one aspect of the Trinity over another, but rather a matter of seeing all aspects in their proper relationship to each other.

Later, Blazon describes for Ramsay the "'God to teach [him] how to be old'" whom he has found: "'...He is the very best of company. Very calm, very quiet, but gloriously alive: we _do_, but He _is_. Not in the least a proselytizer or a careerist, like His sons'" (250). The preaching and teaching that are the accepted hallmarks of conventional Christians are not, apparently, important to the God Blazon has found. In the old man's comparison of human and Divine modes of action, one is reminded of the contrast Ramsay points out between the quiet, trusting Mary and the fervent, though often misguided, Amasa Dempster.

Blazon's reference to "'His sons'" when coupled with the Padre's statement that "'...people forget too readily that Satan is Christ's elder brother...'" (249) draws attention to what Davies appears to consider another important omission in conventional Christian thought. Although for Amasa Dempster and, indeed, for most conventional Christians ideas of God and the Devil, good and evil, are completely divorced from each other, Davies suggests an interrelationship between these forces. In a

radical approach to understanding this relationship, the characters in this novel, and apparently Davies with them, express the view that it is necessary to know something of the Devil and his darkness in order to fully experience God and His light. Liesl tells Ramsay,

> "But every man has a devil, and a man of unusual quality, like yourself...has an unusual devil. You must get to know your personal devil. You must even get to know his father, the Old Devil." (226)

Ramsay tells Blazon that he has met the Devil in the person of Liesl and that "'The Devil proved to be a very good fellow. He suggested that a little compromise would not hurt me'" (249). In a reply that would be uncharacteristic of most orthodox holy men, Blazon responds,

> "I find no fault with that. The Devil knows corners of us all of which Christ Himself is ignorant. Indeed, I am sure Christ learned a great deal that was salutary about Himself when He met the Devil in the wilderness. Of course, that was a meeting of brothers....On the whole, we treat the Devil shamefully, and the worse we treat Him the more He laughs at us." (249-50)[36]

When Ramsay elaborates on his encounter with Liesl, Blazon remarks,

> "You met the Devil as an equal, not cringing or

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[36]Blazon's claim that "'we treat the Devil shamefully'" is in opposition to God's edict, given after the fall of humanity, regarding the relationship that is to exist between humankind, Christ, and Satan. God told the serpent, whose form Satan had adopted,

> "And I will put enmity
> Between you and the woman,
> And between your seed and her Seed;
> He shall bruise your head,
> And you shall bruise His heel." (Gen. 3:15)

> frightened or begging for a trashy favour. That is the heroic life, Ramezay. You are fit to be the Devil's friend, without any fear of losing yourself to Him!" (250)

Judith Skelton Grant observes,

> Davies deliberately links saints with magic in order to raise questions about the nature of good and evil. Like the tales of saints, the world of magic evokes a "world of wonder".... Dunstan is appalled, indignant, and unbelieving when Paul's father declares that both saints and magic are evil. From this time on though, he finds that saints and magic are always deemed good or evil and that the two are curiously associated. ...Both the Virgin and Paul's show feed people's desire for wonders, but the one evokes the divine, the other the diabolic.[37]

Blazon's idea that there is a close kinship between Satan and Christ is just one indication of the way in which those things generally considered to be outside the realm of Christianity have been blended with orthodox Christian views in this novel. Of the belief system underlying Fifth Business Carole Gerson writes, "...an examination of the subtextual framework of [this novel]...reveals that Christian, Jungian and Freudian elements all converge in a complex pattern...."[38] There is also room in the novel's broad interpretation of Christianity for the concepts of fate, destiny, chance, luck, coincidence, magic, and superstition. With respect to his study of the saints, Ramsay says,

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[37]Grant 39.

[38]Carole Gerson, "Dunstan Ramsay's Personal Mythology," Essays on Canadian Writing 6 (Spring 1977): 101.

> My path was certainly an odd one for a Deptford lad, raised as a Protestant, but fate had pushed me in this direction so firmly that to resist would be dangerous defiance. For I was, as you have already guessed, a collaborator with Destiny, not one who put a pistol to its head and demanded particular treasures. (169)

About his encounter with Surgeoner when the latter does a speaking engagement at the school where Ramsay teaches, he says,

> I rather liked the Greek notion of allowing Chance to take a formative hand in my affairs. It was in the autumn of 1928 that Chance did so, and lured me from a broad highway to a narrower path. (129)

The concept of bad luck is invoked in connection with fool-saints, and the idea of good luck is introduced, albeit in a tongue-in-cheek manner, when Ramsay says of Denyse's plan for Boy,

> It was a plan full of risks and contingencies, and if it were to succeed it would be through careful diplomacy and a substantial amount of luck. It was characteristic of Denyse that she decided to get busy with the diplomacy at once, so as to be ready for the luck if it came. (235-36)

Coincidence is used extensively in this novel, for example in Ramsay's meetings with Paul in diverse places, a village in the Tyrol and later, in Mexico. Davies has stated,

> ...I think of coincidence as a powerful element in life, as is also the operation of destiny, which may or may not be blind, but which is unquestionably powerful. This does not make me a thoroughgoing determinist, but certainly I mean to suggest that the forces that shape a man's fate are not wholly under his control, because some of them reside in that part of his psyche that depth-psychologists call the Unconscious.[39]

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[39] Davies, "Deptford Trilogy in Retrospect" 11.

Although in the other novels considered in this thesis there are broad distinctions between Christian belief and magic and superstition, Ramsay works toward an understanding of holy awe and miracles in part through the world of magic and illusion. Also, as noted previously, Ramsay's "ill-wish-[ing]" (43) of Amasa Dempster follows him throughout his life in accordance with his parents' superstitious warning that "The evil wish would surely rebound upon the wisher" (43). These concepts are all foreign to the dictates of Scripture and to orthodox Christian doctrine, but there is room for them in the religious system advocated in this novel. Claude Bissell draws attention to "Davies' unseen world, with its ambiguities, its refusal to accept neat moral dichotomies,"[40] and Stephen Bonnycastle comments on "the new range of spiritual possibilities presented by Fifth Business."[41]

Much of the inclusivity of Davies' approach to Christianity can be ascribed to his consideration of the problem, noted in A Jest of God and Who Has Seen the Wind, of the co-existence of good and evil. No matter how much the writers of the Bible advocate the principle that ultimate victory over sin was achieved through Christ's death on

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[40]Claude Bissell, "World of the Master," Canadian Forum (Dec. 1975 - Jan. 1976): 31.

[41]Stephen Bonnycastle, "Robertson Davies and the Ethics of Monologue," Journal of Canadian Studies 12.1 (Feb. 1977): 35.

the cross, it is impossible to deny that evil is still present in the world. Unlike Ross, Laurence, and Mitchell, who suggest that what appears to be evil or hurtful is part of God's often incomprehensible plan for His creation, Davies and his characters, as already noted, posit the existence of an actual Devil with his accompanying darkness. Much has been written about the Jungian basis of Davies' books, and Davies has explained that his interest in Jungian ideas actually grew out of an attempt to come to terms with questions about evil:

> One reason I was drawn to the study of Freud and Jung was my religious interest, because I very quickly found that for my taste, investigation of religion by orthodox theological means was unrewarding. You never got down to brass tacks, or at least nothing that I ever read did so. You started off by assuming that certain things were true, and then you developed all kinds of splendid things on top of that. I wanted to see about the basic things....I gradually began to look into the works of Jung and found a much more - to me - satisfying attitude towards religion, but it was not an orthodox Christian one. Orthodox Christianity has always had for me the difficulty that it really won't come, in what is for me a satisfactory way, to grips with the problem of evil. It knows an enormous amount about evil, it discusses evil in fascinating terms, but evil is always the other thing: it is something which is apart from perfection, and man's duty is to strive for perfection. I could not reconcile that with such experience of life as I had, and the Jungian feeling that things tend to run into one another, that what looks good can be pushed to the point where it becomes evil, and that evil very frequently bears what can only be regarded as good fruit - this was the first time I'd ever seen that sort of thing given reasonable consideration, and it made enormous sense to me.[42]

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[42]Cameron 40-41.

Gordon Roper writes,

> Jung by temperament was unusually open to the power of the unknown. He felt strongly that the greatest force that shapes the lives of men - call it God, Fate, Destiny, Nature, or the Unconscious - was infinite and ungraspable.[43]

It can be easily seen that Davies' interest in Jungian thought has contributed strongly to his concern with the inexplicable and to his formation of the very unconventional system of Christianity put forward in Fifth Business.[44]

The problem of reconciling good and evil is, however, a very complex one, even when Davies' inclusive concept of religion is employed. In a conclusion similar to that reached by Mitchell and critics alike regarding the validity of the questioning in Who Has Seen the Wind, Judith Skelton Grant observes,

> In the end, the conundrum of how saints are related to magic, good to evil, is not solved, but the solution does not matter. What is important is Dunstan's mind tussling with the problem.[45]

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[43]Gordon Roper, "Robertson Davies' Fifth Business and 'That Old Fantastical Duke of Dark Corners, C. G. Jung,'" Journal of Canadian Fiction 1.1 (Winter 1972): 34.

[44]The influence of Jungian thought on the work of Robertson Davies has been extensively explored in a book by Patricia Monk entitled The Smaller Infinity: The Jungian Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). The material in this thesis is in no way intended to refute the conclusions reached by Monk. No serious reader of Fifth Business could dispute the fact that Jungian concepts play an important part in the novel. The observations made in this thesis should, rather, complement the previous work done on this book since references to Judeo-Christian thought and practice are also prevalent in the text.

[45]Grant 39.

Grant adds,

> About the relation of God and the Devil to the natural world Davies is tentative and searching....He makes Dunstan curious about saints and belief, about magic and evil, but, though Dunstan has a fruitful encounter with his personal devil, he reaches no conclusions.[46]

Although awe and wonder and faith are all parts of Christianity as it is presented in the New Testament, it would be extremely misleading to suggest that Davies is advocating a return to a kind of Christianity that most orthodox believers would recognize or accept. Davies told Donald Cameron,

> I feel now that I am a person of strongly religious temperament, but when I say "religious" I mean immensely conscious of powers of which I can have only the dimmest apprehension, which operate by means that I cannot fathom, in directions which I would be a fool to call either good or bad.... This is something which would never satisfy the humblest parish priest, but I live in a world in which forces are going on which I am unable to tab and identify so that the tickets will stick.[47]

Like Margaret Laurence in A Jest of God and, to a lesser extent, Sinclair Ross in As For Me and My House, Davies appears to be concerned in this novel with the subject of truth. Because, however, Davies' main interest is in the world of wonders, saints, and miracles and in what Padre Blazon calls "'the reality of the soul'" (174) that cannot always be supported by external, objective evidence or "'the

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[46]Grant 47-48.

[47]Cameron 41.

agreement of the world'" (174), the concept of truth presented in Fifth Business is quite different from that put forward in the former novels.

Ramsay begins his journey into mystery and awe by practising illusions with coins and cards. Also, a significant portion of the book is concerned with Ramsay's relationship to Magnus Eisengrim and his troupe, who exist in a world of illusion and magic where nothing, even the romance inspired by a beautiful woman, is as it seems. In fact, early in the novel Ramsay indicates that the entire book will be filled with illusion of one kind or another. He states that he is writing the account of his life from Sorgenfrei, "this house among the mountains - a house that itself holds the truths behind many illusions" (15). Whereas Ross, Laurence, and Davies are all interested in discovering what constitutes God's truth, which, although it may be expressed in terms of various subjects, is itself a single, enduring factor, there are, according to Ramsay, various "truths" behind the magical illusions that play such an important part in this text. In the world of wonder in which Eisengrim, Liesl, and, eventually, Ramsay move, truth is not a firm foundation on which to base one's beliefs. It is simply one more variable in a series of variables that govern human existence in the presence of the supernatural.

The most detailed explanation of truth as it is presented in this novel occurs when Ramsay meets Joel

Surgeoner, the tramp converted by his encounter with Mary Dempster. When Ramsay confronts Surgeoner about what he considers to be the latter's less-than-truthful methods of raising funds and inspiring interest in the Lifeline Mission, methods of which Ramsay has been the brunt, Surgeoner says of his accusation, made in front of the school, that Ramsay is an unbeliever: "'I admit it was a trick.... There's a certain amount of artfulness about it, of course, but a greater end has been served, and nobody has been really hurt'" (133). When Ramsay points out, "'That's a thoroughly crooked-minded attitude'" (133), Surgeoner replies,

> "Perhaps it is. But you're not the first man I've used like that, and I promise you won't be the last. God has to be served, and I must use the means I know. If I'm not false to God - and I try very hard not to be - I don't worry too much about the occasional stranger." (133)

Ramsay accuses Surgeoner of presenting his audience with a "'cock-and-bull story about the cursing sailor and widow's mite'" (132), and Surgeoner admits that the line between truth and fiction is often crossed in his sermons. He explains, however,

> "I expect them to believe the spirit of the story....I provide something that strengthens faith ....These people don't hold me on oath, and they aren't stupid either. They know my poor try at a parable from hard fact." (132-33)

According to Surgeoner, his converts have very little concern for commonly-accepted standards of truth in their approach to salvation. He tells Ramsay,

> "...there is something about this kind of work and the kind of lives these people live that knocks the hard edge off fact. If you think I'm a liar - and you do - you should hear some of the confessions that come out in this place on a big night. Awful whoppers that just pop into the heads of people who have found joy in faith but haven't got past wanting to be important in the world....that love of police-court truth...comes very late on the way, if it comes at all....You unbelieving people apply cruel, hard standards to us who believe." (133)

Surgeoner believes, apparently, that God has a different standard of truth from that usually adhered to by human beings. He admits that God's truth may well be beyond human conception when he says, "'What is truth? as Pilate asked; I've never pretended that I could have told him'" (133). By this Divine standard, Surgeoner suggests, it is possible to seem deceitful and still be within the plan and the code of ethics demanded by the Almighty.

The idea that God's truth may not always be understood by human beings corresponds to the concept put forward by the apostle Paul and noted in A Jest of God that the Divine standard for wisdom differs considerably from the conventional human one. This concept is, in fact, referred to by Padre Blazon when he says, "'Sometimes I wonder why so few saints were also wise. Some were, of course, but more were down-right pig-headed. Often I wonder if God does not value wisdom as much as heroic virtue'" (173). The saints are, presumably, close to God, and if the majority of them seem foolish, God's concepts of wisdom, and possibly His ideas about truth as well, must indeed be different from those

adopted by men and women.

It is true that such an idea about wisdom is not adhered to by Father Regan. This is clear when he explains the concept of a fool-saint to Ramsay by saying,

> "A fool-saint is somebody who seems to be full of holiness and loves everybody and does every good act he can, but because he's a fool it all comes to nothing - to worse than nothing, because it is virtue tainted with madness, and you can't tell where it'll end up. Did you know that Prudence was named as one of the Virtues? There's the trouble with your fool-saint, y'see - no Prudence. Nothing but a lotta bad luck'll rub off on you from one of them." (139)

Although Padre Blazon calls Father Regan "'a fellow of some quality'" (247) and is surprised by his knowledge of fool-saints, he points out that Regan is, after all, "'a village priest'" (247) and that Ramsay has been "'a rash man'" (247) to go to such a person with his weighty questions about Mary Dempster's sainthood. Because he is a village priest, Father Regan has, in all probability, been affected by the codes and standards of the community in which he serves. Davies has made Blazon a holy man who also possesses considerable worldly experience and who guides Ramsay toward new and intriguing kinds of knowledge. Thus, the reader is perhaps more inclined to accept his views on the complicated subject of wisdom than the views of a provincial priest, "obviously good and kind" (139) though he may be.

Following a pattern similar to that established in the other novels examined thus far, the characters in _Fifth Business_ who give instruction in spiritual truth are not

members of the clergy or even conventionally religious persons. Sam West, Deptford's resident atheist, knows more about the true character of Christianity than do many of the village's Christians. Although Ramsay points out that Sam's "detestation of religion and churches was absolute" (54), he also states that Sam "was unfailingly upright in all his dealings, to show the slaves of priestcraft and superstition that morality has nothing to do with religion" (54). Observing and listening to a character like Sam helps Ramsay to reach his conclusion that too much of the Christianity in Deptford is mere moral cant and, consequently, to make it his life's quest to prove that there must be more than this.

As already observed, Mary Dempster, with her "wholly religious" (52) nature and her evidence of living "by a light that arose from within" (52), does not live within the prescribed moral confines of Deptford society. Writing about saints in Canadian literature, Stephen Scobie says,

> The psychic wilderness may most directly be associated with sex, madness, and death; since these are the taboo areas of a restricted society, they are precisely the areas in which the saints are most at home.[48]

Mary is involved in all of these areas. She oversteps the taboos surrounding sex when she gives herself to Surgeoner in the Deptford gravel pit. She enters the realm of madness when it becomes the opinion of Deptford that "'she just

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[48]Stephen Scobie, "Scenes from the Lives of the Saints: A Hagiology of Canadian Literature," Lakehead University Review 7.1 (Summer 1974): 6.

isn't all there'" (24) and when she is committed to an insane asylum. Prior to this committal, Mary associates herself with death when she appears to raise Willie from the dead.

Although she lives outside the moral and religious codes of Deptford, Mary does seem to personify Padre Blazon's assessment of her as "'a great lover of God, and trusting greatly in His love for her'" (248). When she raises Willie, she is merely enacting Christ's words to the twelve apostles: "'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give'" (Matt. 10:8). It is perhaps a sign of her trust in God and His Scriptural promises that Mary seems "deeply pleased" but does "not seem particularly surprised" (60) when Willie stirs.

Mary also practises the New Testament idea of forgiveness. Even after her disgrace, when she lives a miserable life tied to a rope inside her home, she, according to Ramsay, "was not resentful" (53). Mary is, apparently, one of the few people in the texts under consideration who are capable of carrying out Christ's injunction to forgive not just "'seven times, but up to seventy times seven'" (Matt. 18:22).

In accordance with the dictates of the New Testament, Mary holds her possessions lightly. Christ said, "'Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you

do not turn away'" (Matt. 5:42). Giving is a part of Mary's nature, and no matter how little she has herself, she feels compelled to give away some of what she owns, even if it is only "bunches of wilted rhubarb, or some rank lettuce, or other stuff from her garden" (44) or a vase that is "part of the furnishings of the parsonage, not the personal property of the Dempsters," the giving of which puts the church ladies "up in arms at this act of feckless generosity" (28). Mrs. Ramsay emphasizes the comparison between Mary and the rest of the villagers when she says, "'The poor soul dearly loves to give...and it would be wicked to deny her. The pity is that more people with more to give don't feel the same way'" (44). Mary is even willing to give herself to Surgeoner "in a most un-Protestant manner."[49] The scene with Surgeoner is, of course, a comic exaggeration of the principle in question. Mary's giving of herself does constitute adultery, a sin condemned in both the Old and New Testaments, but Davies implies that Mary's generous, if foolish, act is more admirable than are the self-righteous and niggardly comments of the women of Deptford. Surgeoner's description of his encounter with Mary, although again greatly exaggerated, marks this event, within the context of the novel, as an outward sign of Mary's generous spirit rather than mere adultery. In fact, his description suggests that there is something of the Divine in Mary's

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[49]Macey 34.

action:

> She was clean and looked like an angel to me....it was glory come into my life. It was as if I had gone right down into Hell and through the worst of the fire, and come on a clear, pure pool where I could wash and be clean....I ran out of that town laughing and shouting like the man who was delivered from devils by Our Lord. As I had been, you see. He worked through that woman, and she is a blessed saint, for what she did for me.... (135-36)

That Surgeoner's salvation is achieved through Mary Dempster's adultery is a continuation of Davies' theme that it is necessary to arrive at a true relationship with God and faith at least in part through a relationship with the Devil and his devices.[50]

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[50]Davies may, in fact, be making a play on the biblical story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3-11) who received mercy and compassion from Christ. Jesus' refusal to condemn the woman for her sin is in direct contrast to the accusations and scorn levelled at Mary Dempster by the residents of Deptford. By allowing Mary to engage in this particular sin, Davies may be emphasizing the lack of Christ-like thought and action in the village.

Davies may also intend Mary Dempster, with her violation of Deptford's sexual taboos, as a parallel of the Virgin Mary who, when she became pregnant, appeared to have violated the sexual mores of her society, even though the pregnancy was actually a miracle effected by the Holy Spirit. The fact that Ramsay associates Mary Dempster with the little Madonna he sees during the war strengthens the case for this comparison.

It should, in fact, be noted that the two biblical women mentioned here are not the only examples of women in Scripture who commit sexual sins and yet play an important part in God's plan. Writing about the genealogy of Jesus Christ presented in Chapter 1 of Matthew's Gospel, Louis A. Barbieri, Jr. says,

> [An] interesting fact about Matthew's genealogy is the inclusion of four Old Testament women: Tamar (Matt. 1:3), Rahab (v. 5), Ruth (v. 5), and Solomon's mother (v. 6), Bathsheba. All of these women...were questionable in some way. Tamar and Rahab were prostitutes (Gen. 38:24;

Ramsay says that when he finally found the little Madonna who had saved him during the war he noted that Mary's face "had never been so beautiful in feature, but the expression was undeniably hers - an expression of mercy and love, tempered with perception and penetration" (251). The qualities valued in the New Testament come alive in Mary, but the question is raised whether these qualities are so unrealistic in relation to the actual world that they can only be manifested in those who are "simple" (27) or mentally unbalanced. As was the case with Saint Sammy in Who Has Seen the Wind, there is a good deal of ambiguity in the portrayal of Mary Dempster. She certainly has, Davies implies, a unique relationship with her God, but because of her madness, her Christian virtues are manifested in strange ways. Still, Ramsay learns from her those things that are necessary if the Christianity of the Gospels is ever to play a meaningful part in his life and in the lives of the residents of Deptford.

Padre Blazon, another of the spiritual guides in the novel, has, it is true, chosen a life of service to God.

Josh. 2:1), Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess (Ruth 1:4) [who brought foreign blood into the Jewish race through her marriage to Boaz, a Jew], and Bathsheba committed adultery (2 Sam. 11:2-5). (Louis A. Barbieri, Jr., "Matthew," The Bible Knowledge Commentary, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, New Testament ed. [Victor Books: Wheaton, IL, 1983] 18.)

Thus, there is substantial Scriptural precedent for Davies' creation of Mary Dempster in her dual role as village whore and possible saint.

Blazon does not, however, follow the conventional moral and behavioural codes of his religion. Although gluttony has long been recognized as a sin,[51] Blazon is concerned that Ramsay should have brought "'the refreshment basket'" (173) when they set out together, and even though it is only half-past nine in the morning, he tells Ramsay, "'It might be provident to take some of that brandy immediately....I know this journey, and sometimes the motion of the train can be very distressing'" (173). Blazon is also fond of "fat nudes" (178), a taste rarely cultivated openly by conventional men of God, and when Ramsay tells him the story of his experiences with Eisengrim and Liesl, he records that Blazon "listened with a great show of prudery at the dirty bits; he sniggered behind his hand...; he snorted with laughter" (250). Such actions are hardly in keeping with the various Scriptural admonitions to avoid lust in all its forms.[52] Blazon is capable of enjoying heretical literature and tells Ramsay, "'...I made her [a nun] read a lot of <u>Le Juif errant</u> to me. Her French is very chaste, but the book nearly burned her tongue - so very anticlerical, you know'" (247). The old Jesuit does not even hold the prayers of his faith in reverence. Having boarded the train from

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[51]Proverbs 23:21, for instance, contains the prediction, "For the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty."

[52]See, for instance, Galatians 5:16:

> I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Brussels to Vienna, he and Ramsay proceed to keep the carriage to themselves by "roar[ing] the Lord's Prayer in Latin" followed by "a few rousing Aves and Agnus Deis" (173). Blazon also attempts to hide his real feelings about spiritual things from the nuns who are taking care of him. When Ramsay asks if he has found "'a God to teach [him] how to be old,'" Blazon responds, "'Shhh, not so loud. The nuns must not know in what a spiritual state I am'" (250). Although he is involved in a spiritual quest, Padre Blazon prefers to live a lie and appear to be nothing more than a gluttonous, lustful reprobate with no interest in holy things.

Still, Blazon thinks deeply about his relationship to the various Members of the Trinity and acquaints Ramsay with his thoughts on the subject. The old Jesuit is also able to give a charitable assessment of Mary Dempster, the woman scorned by nominal Christians. Blazon cautions Ramsay against dogmatism, and in spite of the numerous remarks with which he belittles Protestantism, he shows a tolerance for Ramsay and his fascination with saints and miracles that is not demonstrated by the conventionally devout Father Regan. With the creation of Padre Blazon, Davies once again illustrates the idea that those who live outside the conventional Christian community are better able to demonstrate the principles of genuine Christian thought and action than are those who follow traditional Christian dictates to the

letter.

Liesl, who also teaches Ramsay much that is spiritually important, is another unconventional character in the standard Christian sense. She does, in fact, admit that "'Several of my father's family are parsons'" (210), but she has come a long way from conventional Christian belief. She has abandoned Calvinism as "'a cruel way of life, even if you forget the religion and call it ethics or decent behaviour or something else that pushes God out of it'" (226), and, as already noted, she advises Ramsay to "'shake hands with [his] devil'" (226). Liesl is, in fact, allied with the Devil a number of times in the text. She closely associates herself with magic and deception, and Eisengrim explains that the fact that "'my miracles have a spice of the Devil about them'" is "'my patron's [Liesl's] idea'" (262). Liesl has many lovers, Ramsay among them, and her relationship with Faustina indicates that she is, in fact, bisexual. Orthodox Christians would consider Liesl a thoroughly evil character.

Liesl is, however, the person who is able to explain to Ramsay "'the revenge of the unlived life'" (226) that has damaged his relationship with the world around him. Although she does not subscribe to traditional Christian beliefs, her comments reveal that she, like Padre Blazon, has done a great deal of thinking about Christianity and has come to a new and in-depth understanding of the subject.

With keen insight, she observes that those who "'want to show they can be Christians without Christ....are the worst; they have the cruelty of doctrine without the poetic grace of myth'" (226). According to Liesl, it is necessary to maintain an awareness of the Divine in one's religion in order to temper the human additions that have been made to it. This is an idea to which Ramsay and, it appears, Davies readily subscribe. Ramsay says about making love with Liesl, "...never had I known such deep delight or such an aftermath of healing tenderness" (227). The "sinful" Liesl is able to minister peace and to begin in Ramsay a healing process unlike anything he has experienced in righteous Deptford. She, not an orthodox Christian believer, is able to help Ramsay move into a deeper understanding of the spiritual mysteries he seeks to explore. Liesl is, in fact, able to teach Ramsay how to live.

In addition to drawing a distinction between those who actually implement Christian principles yet do not live a conventional Christian life-style and those who follow standard Christian dictates yet have nothing of Gospel-based Christianity in their lives, Davies also uses the idea of unorthodox spiritual guides to emphasize his belief that it is impossible for any human being to be totally good in the orthodox Christian sense. Padre Blazon tells Ramsay, "'My shadow manifested itself quite late in life'" (176). Davies is following Jung's teaching when he stresses the idea that

no man or woman, even a wise teacher, can be without his or her "'shadow'" (176) or, as Liesl says, "'personal devil'" (226). Davies explained this concept to some extent when he said, "You have got to get rid of a lot of the Shadow side of your nature before you come to the reality of it. The Shadow is the inferior side, the unacknowledged evil."[53]

According to Jung and the spiritual teachers in Fifth Business, the Shadow side of one's personality is a necessary component of one's total being.[54] The Scriptures,

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[53]Robertson Davies, "The Table Talk of Robertson Davies," The Enthusiasms of Robertson Davies, ed. Judith Skelton Grant (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979) 314.

[54]Gordon Roper explains Jung's idea of the "shadow" in the following way:

> Jung's most revolutionary concept was that the psyche in each individual - the total personality - is made up of three components. The only component we know directly is our ego, that small spark of consciousness, or awareness of the self and what lies around outside of us, perceptible to us through our senses. This spark of consciousness floats in a sea of unconsciousness of two distinguishable kinds. The sea closest to our consciousness Jung termed the "personal unconscious", and assumed that it was made up of memories, feelings, or states of mind which once were within the consciousness but now have slipped or were pushed outside....as consciousness grows in the individual's earliest years, the ego tends to suppress or to drive into the personal unconscious those functions which oppose its development. This suppressed part of the personality, gathering force in the personal unconscious, Jung called "the shadow". By "shadow" he meant that it was the dark or more primitive side of consciousness, not that it was immoral or evil.
>
> As our ego grows, our shadow grows. And under certain conditions the shadow will erupt into our consciousness. Then we find ourselves feeling or doing something which startles us because it seems out of character. After, we may

however, speak of being "'born again'" (John 3:3) by the Holy Spirit and consequently subduing one's "old man" (Rom. 6:6; cf. Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). The apostle Paul writes,

> Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be <u>in the likeness</u> of <u>His</u> resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with <u>Him</u>, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.
> For he who has died has been freed from sin. (Rom. 6:4-7)

Davies' concept, learned from Jung, advocates not overcoming one's darker side, but coming to terms with it. Davies has said,

> I don't think that perfection is possible or even, in psychological terms, desirable for human beings.
> I think it is absolutely necessary for a man to recognize and accept the evil in himself. If he does that he is in a position to make the evil work in a different way....[55]

In accordance with his view that good and evil are present in each human being, Davies presents his readers with characters who act in often contradictory ways. Fiona Ramsay, Dunstable's mother, is one of the best examples of

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> say "I was not myself," or "I was beside myself"....An ego which refuses for long to recognize the existence and force of its shadow is inviting disruption. A healthy ego expands its consciousness by recognizing its shadow and by accepting its reality. This is one way of coming to know one's Self. (Roper 34-35)

[55]Davies, "A Talk with Tom Harpur" 316.

the dual way in which Davies portrays the Deptford Christians. Mrs. Ramsay's decision to go and extend help to Mary Dempster and her baby is certainly in keeping with Jesus' teachings about giving aid to those less fortunate. Fiona dedicates herself to the welfare of the infant Paul, remaining at the Dempster home until four in the morning on the night of his birth. Ramsay says of his mother that

> she was willing to put [her] levelness of head at the service of almost anybody who needed it. And she had a tenderness, never obviously displayed, for poor, silly Mrs Dempster.... (12)

He also states, "She [Mrs. Ramsay] was not...in any sense a midwife or a trained person - simply a woman of good sense and kindness of heart who enjoyed the authority of nursing..." (19). Ramsay's reference to his mother's enjoyment of authority does indicate that Mrs. Ramsay's efforts on behalf of the Dempsters may not be purely selfless. There are elements of pride and self-satisfaction involved. Still, one may be willing to concede that Fiona's untiring efforts to insure Paul's survival, even at the expense of her own family, who were forced to suffer "disorganization of [the] household" (22) and "many a scratch meal" (22), is in large part rooted in kindness and a genuine desire to help:

> My mother, who could certainly never have been accused of softness with her family or the world, went out of her way to help Mrs Dempster....she tried to "show her the ropes," and whatever these mysterious feminine ropes were, they certainly included many good things that my mother cooked and just happened to leave when she dropped in on

> the young bride, and not merely the loan, but the practical demonstrations of such devices as carpet-stretchers, racks for drying lace curtains, and the art of shining windows with newspaper. (26)

Perhaps the greatest testimonial to Mrs. Ramsay's Christian concern is found in Ramsay's account of his mother's dealings with the simple Mrs. Dempster when the latter would bring wilted garden produce to the Ramsay home:

> A poor actress, she [Mrs. Ramsay] nevertheless feigned pleasure over the things that were given and always insisted that something be taken in return, usually something big and lasting. She always remembered what Mrs Dempster had brought and told her how good it had been, though usually it was only fit to be thrown away. (44)

Once again, Davies points out that obedience to the principles of Christianity involves something beyond mere observance of the letter of the law. The fact that Mrs. Ramsay tells a lie is seen by Ramsay as being less important than her charitable motive for doing so. Ramsay notes,

> After a year or so most of the women in our village grew tired of pitying the Baptist parson and his wife....But my mother never wavered; her compassion was not of the short-term variety. (28)

That Mrs. Ramsay does display Christian compassion to a considerable degree is confirmed by Milo Papple when he tells Ramsay about his mother's work during the Deptford flu epidemic: "'And your Ma, Dunny - God, she was a wonderful woman! Never let up on nursing and taking soup and stuff around till your Dad went'" (104). Father Regan concurs with Milo's opinion when he tells Dunstan, "'...I admired your parents. Fine people...'" (138).

Still, Mrs. Ramsay's compassion cannot reach the perfection called for in the New Testament. Although she is willing to forgive Mrs. Dempster for a large number of faults, her capacity for forgiveness abruptly reaches its limit when Mary's transgression is in the sexual realm. Ramsay says of the quarrel that occurs in his home following Mary Dempster's disgrace,

> My father accused my mother of wanting charity; she replied that as the mother of two boys she had standards of decency to defend....Of course my mother won. If my father had not given in he would have had to live with outraged female virtue for - perhaps the rest of his life. (49)

The Fiona Ramsay who nursed a frail baby to health and showed compassion for a simple-minded woman is the same Fiona who, when Dunstable takes an egg to use for his magic tricks, grabs a pony whip and follows her son around the kitchen "slashing [him] with the whip" and who, when he cries, only "beat [him] harder" (35-36). She is also the woman of whom Ramsay says at her death,

> I knew she had eaten my father, and I was glad I did not have to fight any longer to keep her from eating me. Oh, these good, ignorant, confident women! How one grows to hate them! (81)

This side of Mrs. Ramsay is referred to by the adult Paul when he says of Ramsay's parents, "'Hard people - I remember them clearly. Hard people - especially your mother'" (262). Perhaps the truth about both of Ramsay's parents is closer to the conception of them that their son is able to formulate later in life: "...in my thirties I was able to see

them as real people, who had done the best they could in the lives fate had given them" (81).

Others in Deptford reflect the same ambiguity of character and action demonstrated by Fiona Ramsay. Even the Reverend Amasa Dempster, a man who "walked very closely with God" (40), is unable to maintain his pose of unconditional love indefinitely. Amasa evidences husbandly concern and love as he walks with Mary in the evening, "her arm tucked in his and...leaning towards her in the protective way he had" (10). Ramsay remarks on the care the Reverend Dempster gives his injured wife. He describes Amasa as "kneeling beside her, holding her in his arms and speaking to her in terms of endearment" (11). Amasa is, as previously noted, also willing to express his love for his wife in terms of practical service, drawing water for Mary when she is pregnant although such consideration is scorned by the residents of Deptford. Even when Mary is found in the gravel pit in a position of ultimate disgrace, Amasa treats her gallantly. Ramsay recalls, "He put her arm under his and set out for home, just as if they were going for a walk" (48). Amasa is, it seems, extending to his wife the same kind of complete forgiveness that is called for by Christ in the New Testament, the kind of forgiveness given by Calla to Rachel in A Jest of God. This same Amasa is, however, entirely oblivious to his wife's feelings. He decides, immediately after she has given birth, to "pray out loud by her bed-

side," and Ramsay reports that the Reverend Dempster

> besought God, if He must take the soul of Mary Dempster to Him, to do so with gentleness and mercy. He reminded God that little Paul had been baptized, and that therefore the soul of the infant was secure and would be best able to journey to Heaven in the company of its mother. (21)

This is not the only instance of this kind of insensitivity. Ramsay records that Amasa "never finished [family prayers] without asking God for strength to bear his heavy cross by which I knew that he meant Mrs Dempster; she knew it too" (40).

Amasa, like Reverend Hislop of Who Has Seen the Wind and Philip Bentley of As For Me and My House, does not display the courage exhibited in Scripture. About the shivaree organized at the Dempsters' new home by the town rowdies, Ramsay says, "I wish I could record that Amasa Dempster came out and faced them, but he did not" (51). Ramsay notes, "...it was the comedown, the disgrace, that broke Dempster. He had been a parson, which was the work dearest to his heart; now he was nothing in his own eyes..." (51). One wonders, however, whether, as in the case of Reverend Hislop, Amasa Dempster's defeat by the circumstances of his life is not, in part, occasioned by the fact that he lacks the spiritual valour called for by Christ and His New Testament followers.[56] In order to combat the

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[56]It is Mary Dempster, not her husband, who demonstrates this kind of courage. Ramsay writes that "the queerest thing about her was that she had no fear" (53), and before Ramsay leaves for the army, Mary counsels him,

less-than-Christian behaviour of orthodox churchgoers, it is apparently necessary to have the boldness exhibited by the biblical ministers of the Gospel who were willing to face prison and death in the cause of Christ. Such courage, however, seems to be missing from most of the pastors in the texts examined in this thesis, and therein lies their inability to conquer the forces that are exerted against them.

Amasa's lot is also compounded by the sin of pride that surfaces in his nature. Recalling his boyhood lecture by the Reverend Dempster, Ramsay says, "I am sure my parents knew Amasa Dempster had warned me away and had assumed that it was part of the crazy pride and self-sufficiency that had been growing on him" (45). Mary's aunt, Bertha Shanklin, confirms that pride is at the root of many of the troubles experienced by the Dempsters when she tells Ramsay,

> "I could have made it easier for her [Mary], but Amasa was so proud and even a little mite hateful about Mary having any money of her own that I just said, All right, they can paddle their own canoe." (140)

When Miss Shanklin contrasts Mary before her marriage with the Mrs. Dempster Deptford has come to know, the price of such pride is evident. She tells Ramsay, "'Life with Amasa seems to have been so dark and wintry and hopeless. Mary used to be so full of hope - before she married'" (141).

"'There's just one thing to remember; whatever happens, it does no good to be afraid'" (65). Ramsay draws attention to Mary's peculiar kind of courage when he writes about her "reclamation of Surgeoner by an act of charity that was certainly heroic in terms of the <u>mores</u> of Deptford" (161).

Amasa, who "'died praying'" (141), has made a sincere but often erroneous attempt to serve his God. Miss Shanklin makes a telling statement about the dichotomies of thought and action that exist within men and women when she says, "'Love can make you do some mean actions when you think it has been snubbed'" (140).

Ramsay also demonstrates that he has "two, if not twenty-two, sides" (72) to his nature. He indicates that he can be charitable in his assessments of others when he says of Reverend Dempster's seemingly heartless behaviour immediately following Paul's birth, "He was a parson, of course, but at root he was a frightened farmer lad, and if he lost his head I cannot now blame him" (21). Of Amasa's family prayers that served to hurt both his wife and his son, Ramsay says,

> This was the only unkindness he ever offered her. In everything else he was patient and, so far as his spirit permitted, loving....I do not think he knew that he was hinting to God to notice the meek spirit in which he bore his ill luck, but that was the impression his prayers left on my mind. He was no skilled rhetorician, and the poor man had nothing much in the way of brains, so very often what he felt came out more clearly than what he meant to say. (40-41)

These assessments of Amasa Dempster are, however, the product of much thought over the years about the situation. At the time the events Ramsay is describing were taking place he felt quite differently about them: "My own dislike was kept for Amasa Dempster" (40), he says, and "I never saw her [Mary] without a pang of guilt and concern about her. But

for her husband I had no pity" (44).

Ramsay does seem to demonstrate selflessness in the fact that he "visited Mrs Dempster forty Saturdays every year and at Easter, Christmas, and on her birthday in addition" (180). This same Ramsay, however, denies Mary Dempster the financial aid, and consequently the better care, that Boy might have been able to provide for her had he been requested to do so:

> ...Boy had a way of dominating anything with which he was associated; if I got help from him...he would have established himself as Mrs Dempster's patron and saviour and I would have been demoted to his agent. My own motives were not clear or pure: I was determined that if I could not take care of Mrs Dempster, nobody else should do it. She was mine. (180)

Ramsay is well aware of his failings. He tells the Headmaster to whom he is writing, "...God forbid that I should pretend that there is not a generous measure of spite in my nature" (101).

Like Amasa Dempster, Ramsay is not willing to courageously defend his convictions or the woman he once loved. When describing the troubled marriage of Leola and Boy, he admits, "I never intervened when Leola was having a rough time....To be honest, I must say also that I did not want to shoulder the burdens of a peacemaker..." (153). Here is neither the valour called for in Scripture nor the desire for peace and love that Christ considered so important that He proclaimed, "'Blessed <u>are</u> the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God'" (Matt. 5:9).

The two sides of Ramsay's character are well illustrated when he tells about his stint in the army. During this time, Ramsay reads his copy of the New Testament so frequently that he earns "a disagreeable reputation as a religious fellow, a Holy Joe" (71) as well as the nickname "Deacon" (71). Ramsay denies that he had much interest in the New Testament, stating, "...I would rather have had some big, meaty novels" (71). Still, the New Testament must have had a certain allure since he "read it to the bone, over and over" (71). Not liking the reputation and nickname he has acquired, Ramsay volunteers to do an imitation of Charlie Chaplin in an amateur vaudeville show and tells "all the dirtiest jokes" (72) he knows. He says of the soldiers' reaction to his performance, "They could hardly conceive that anybody who read the Testament could be other than a Holy Joe - could have another, seemingly completely opposite side to his character" (72).

In groups, as well as individually, the villagers of Deptford display a dual nature. The "virtue, dignity, and even...nobility" (16) that Ramsay acknowledges are present in Deptford are demonstrated when, in an act of selfless charity, the men of the village come regularly to the Ramsay home to give Willie "immersions in warm water at four-hour intervals" (58):

> ...practical help of this kind was what it [Deptford] understood best; six immersions a day were nothing, in the light of their desire to lend a hand. Even the new Presbyterian minister, the

> Reverend Donald Phelps...was a volunteer....Getting Willie through this bad time became a public cause. (58)

In opposition to these acts of charity, however, there are also plenty of examples of "sins and follies and roughnesses" (16) in Deptford. Like Mr. Powelly in Who Has Seen the Wind who attempted to visit the sins of the Ben on his son, the residents of Deptford make Paul Dempster pay for the sins of his mother. Ramsay points out that

> Paul was not a village favourite, and the dislike so many people felt for his mother - dislike for the queer and persistently unfortunate - they attached to the unoffending son. (40)

The adult Paul tells Ramsay, "'...I had to bear the cruelty of people who thought her [Mary Dempster's] kind of madness was funny - a dirty joke'" (148).

The cruelty inherent in the residents of Deptford reaches its climax when, in an elaborate pantomime, the Kaiser is burned in effigy on the village flagpole. The picture Ramsay paints of the crowd that night is a terrifying one:

> Then the cheers were loud, and the children hopped and scampered round the foot of the flagpole, shouting, "Hang the Kaiser!" with growing hysteria; some of them were much too small to know what hanging was, or what a Kaiser might be, but I cannot call them innocent, for they were being as vicious as their age and experience allowed. And the people in the crowd, as I looked at them, were hardly recognizable as the earnest citizens who, not half an hour ago, had been so biddable under the spell of patriotic oratory....Here they were, in this murky, fiery light, happily acquiescent in a symbolic act of cruelty and hatred. (102)

Ramsay states that he "watched them with dismay that mounted

towards horror, for these were my own people" and that he left early because he "had not wanted to stay till the end" (102).

Even in the lives of the saints, there are shadows as well as heroism and holiness in the cause of Christ. Padre Blazon makes this evident when he tells Ramsay about St. Joseph's role as "'cuckold'" (172), the surmise of some that the Virgin may have been "'a divine daughter as well as a divine mate'" (172), and "'the scandal that makes it necessary to keep apart the statues of Mary and those of St John'" (172). Blazon explains that in order to have a complete faith, it is necessary to understand that the saints had darker sides:

> "But all this terrible talk about the saints is not disrespect, Ramezay. Far from it! It is faith! It is love! It takes the saint to the heart by supplying the other side of his character that history or legend has suppressed - that he may very well have suppressed himself in his struggle toward sainthood. The saint triumphs over sin....Mankind cannot endure perfection; it stifles him. He demands that even the saints should cast a shadow. If they, these holy ones who have lived so greatly but who still carry their shadows with them, can approach God, well then, there is hope for the worst of us." (172-73)

In addition to pointing out the darker side of human beings, Davies also draws attention to the way in which basic Christian teachings, even when followed, are not always implemented in Christian ways. Ramsay says of Boy that he "loved to defeat hostility by turning the other cheek - which is by no means a purely Christian ploy, as Boy

had shown me countless times" (257). Michael Peterman observes,

> In Dunstan Ramsay's self-presentation, Davies eschews conventional Christian wisdom. To impose New Testament ethics upon personality might seem commendable but ethics in Fifth Business have little to do with actual human motivation....For Ramsay and for Davies, turning the other cheek, meekness, and the Golden Rule have little to do with human action....A man must husband the sources of his strength, not by trying to reform his instincts, but by recognizing and understanding their inevitable energy and expression.[57]

Robertson Davies deals with the same question about human capability raised by Sinclair Ross in As For Me and My House. According to Davies, men and women are simply not capable of consistently applying to their daily existence the high moral code called for in Scripture. Davies asserts that no matter how good their intentions may be, human beings will not, in most cases, be strong enough to make those good resolutions the only governing factors in their lives. This is simply, according to Davies, part of being human. He has stated, "...you've got to forgive yourself for being an awful lot of things which you just are."[58]

Although questions about the successful incorporation of Gospel-based principles into the human situation have been evident in the other novels examined in this thesis, Davies seems even less convinced than are the authors of

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[57]Peterman 125.

[58]Davies, "A Talk with Tom Harpur" 317.

these other texts that all the wrongs that pass for modern Christianity can be righted simply through attempts to adopt the standards of love and good works cited by Christ and His followers. Davies, however, does seem to think that at least some of the values that are part of the New Testament conception of Chrictianity are necessary in order to give quality to life. As do Ross, Laurence, and Mitchell, he describes instances of love and nobility, like the nursing of Paul and the bathing of Willie, and contrasts these with events that illustrate how base human nature can be when such traits are lacking. The shivaree organized for the Dempsters, the burning of the Kaiser in effigy, and Boy Staunton's treatment of Leola are all examples of this latter kind of behaviour. Such contrasts effectively demonstrate how unbearable existence can become when the codes of thought and action called for by Christ do not play at least some part. F. L. Radford writes that "Davies argues that Evil is frequently 'depicted as the failure of Love, or to use the older word that has no merely romantic overtone, of loving kindness.'"[59] Davies has also said,

> We've got to stop pounding away at the Logos idea (word, reason) and do some serious thinking about the Eros principle; i.e. the principle of love and relationship as women know it, instead of a frosty, disembodied love of God which seems so often to exercise itself in such horrifying

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[59]Radford 78. Radford quotes from: Robertson Davies, <u>One Half of Robertson Davies</u> (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977) 263.

ways.[60]

It is not that Davies disagrees with the authors who advocate the principle that acts of love and service should be an integral part of Christianity. Davies, too, asserts that the implementation of such a code of conduct is at least a beginning in righting the wrongs of society. He merely questions whether it is possible to perform selfless acts of love for an extended period of time.

In this novel, as in the novels considered previously, the question arises as to whether or not the codes of thought and behaviour referred to are specifically Christian. To answer this question, readers must once again consider the framework that surrounds the discussion of these traits and qualities. In Fifth Business there are many references to the Christian Church in its various forms, and several characters in the novel are concerned with saints and with the subject of faith. There are also the various biblical references interspersed throughout the book.[61] As was the case in the other texts that have been examined, there is sufficient internal evidence to indicate that the author was, in fact, concerned to a large extent

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[60]Davies, "A Talk with Tom Harpur" 318.

[61]Ramsay notes that Boy and his friends discussed the people who "wanted to reap where [they] had not sown" (167; cf. Matt. 25:24-26); Liesl refers to "'the law and the prophets'" (221; cf. Matt. 22:40); Ramsay speaks of "turning the other cheek" (257; cf. Matt. 5:39); Paul calls Boy "'the Rich Young Ruler'" (259; cf. Matt. 19:16-24), and the list of biblical allusions and quotations goes on and on.

with Christian ethics and ideologies when he wrote this novel.

It is most important to remember, however, that Davies is not content to call merely for a return to a gospel of love that includes the principles of compassion and service taught by Christ. Like W. O. Mitchell, he advocates the necessity of recognizing the role the miraculous must play in any true conception of Christianity. With the creation of Denyse and Boy, Davies points out that what appears to be an act of social justice based on Christian commitment may, in fact, be something quite different. Ramsay says of Denyse,

> ...she was a woman whose life and interests were entirely external. It was not that she was indifferent to the things of the spirit; she sensed their existence and declared herself their enemy. ...All her moral and ethical energy, which was abundant, was directed towards social reform. (240)

Of Boy Ramsay says, "...he was a public figure, prominent in many philanthropic causes...," but he adds, "He hated unfortunate people, but, after all, these are one's raw material if one sets up shop as a philanthropist" (241). Ramsay also points out the folly of unreasoned compassion when he writes, "Thus [with the death of Orpheus Wettenhall] I learned two lessons: that popularity and good character are not related, and that compassion dulls the mind faster than brandy" (162). Although Davies has his protagonist realize the value of genuine love and care for one's fel-

lows, Dunstan Ramsay's chief revelation is that the mystery and power of the Gospel miracles and the wonder of the book of Revelation are not only part of the New Testament, they are, in fact, the aspects of Christianity that mark this faith as a religion with power, not merely a gospel of social concern.

Robertson Davies urges more than a return to New Testament Christianity, and the belief system he calls for includes much more than the teachings of Christ. The Christianity of the New Testament in all its aspects is an important part of this system, but as Claude Bissell explains,

> The "unseen world" is not the world of formal religion. Indeed, there is a good deal of sharp satiric comment on formal religion....Davies' "unseen world"....consists of [among others] people of faith who believe in miracles and are sustained by them, and of scholars like Ramsay and the Jesuit Bollardiste [sic] who devote themselves to the study of sainthood. This Unseen World embraces God and Mammon, both Christ and the Devil.[62]

It is this added dimension, the recognition of the "unseen world," including its darker aspects, that Ramsay and Davies believe must replace the "stricken, lifeless, unreal quality" (52) of traditional religious thought if Christianity and its God are to be experienced in their totality and are to present a real alternative to the mundane and often cruel reality of the modern world.

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[62]Bissell 31.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the authors of the novels that have been considered in this thesis have devoted a great deal of time to thinking about the significance of the spiritual in communities and individual lives. As noted in the introduction, the rigid beliefs associated with traditional Christianity and religion that involves "form without spirit"[1] are seen by Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies as equally damaging. The protests against such damage take a wide variety of forms. Characters like Mrs. Bentley and Rachel attempt to deny the very existence of God. Those like the child Brian and the intellectual Dunstan Ramsay seek to find a new element in worship that transcends the form and pettiness of the organized Church. A character like Sean O'Connal expresses his anger at the state of things by rejecting all that a "Christian" life-style entails and cursing everything around him, thus hiding from the world his tender and compassionate heart; indeed, tenderness and compassion often seem to be the very things that have been weeded out of organized churches in Canada and the vision of Christianity held by their members. Gone forever

[1]Sandra Djwa, "No Other Way: Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," Canadian Literature 47 (Winter 1971): 63.

is the vision of the organized Church found in a book like The Man from Glengarry in which the criticism of the Church and its doctrines is tempered by pride in and love for the traditions of the author's faith. A harsh religious doctrine has fostered some angry characters. Even when the tenets of that doctrine have been largely forgotten, the forms have remained, and the angry characters have also become empty ones who go through the motions of religion because, although they no longer subscribe fully to the traditional beliefs of which these forms were once a part, they have not found an adequate replacement for the beliefs they once held. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Calvinism has become a blanket term used by authors and critics to describe the harsh and rigid system of religious thought to which Canadians have become heir. Liesl tells Ramsay,

> "[Calvinism] is a cruel way of life, even if you forget the religion and call it ethics or decent behaviour or something else that pushes God out of it....they want to show they can be Christians without Christ....they have the cruelty of doctrine without the poetic grace of myth."[2]

In each of the novels that have been examined, a similar pattern has emerged. Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies have each begun by examining the effects of an unyielding religious heritage on a community and the church members there. Guilt and a sense of sin as well as the

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[2]Robertson Davies, Fifth Business (1970; Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1977) 226.

presence of an authoritarian God pervade the communities in these novels. There is exclusion and prejudice born of insistence on conformity. The sin of pride is evident in the attitudes of the people toward their religious and racial heritage, and the more pride they take in their achievements and the achievements of their ancestors, the more they become rooted in traditional religion that has its basis in the human rather than in the Divine. As the characters in these novels come to see the inadequacies in the Church and their conceptions of God, they turn to false gods and idols. In some cases they even begin to imagine that they can play the part of God themselves. Dissatisfied with their conception of Jehovah, the Israelites, God's chosen people of the Old Testament, turned time and time again to idols and other forms of worship. As did the Israelites, however, the characters in these four novels find their new forms of worship disappointing. A dead and powerless Church is replaced by powerless gods in other forms.

The inhabitants of the communities in these four novels have a need to see the power of God manifested in their lives, but in non-threatening ways. They are in desperate need of salvation, not only from the predicaments in which their various sins have placed them, but also from the external forces that threaten to defeat them. Having realized the uselessness of the new gods they have attempted to serve, a number of individuals try to salvage some portion

of the faith they have been making an effort to reject, or at least improve upon. At this point, they begin to consider the value of the principles put forward in the Gospels, and the possibility of change and improvement is suggested.

One of the major strengths of the texts I have chosen to consider is the fact that each offers some hope that the evils of the past and the threats of the present can be, if not overcome, at least made bearable. Margaret Laurence has said of her own work, "Optimism in this world seems impossible to me. But in each novel there is some hope, and that is a different thing entirely."[3] The hope, it seems, lies in accepting that part of the Christian tradition that seems to offer an alternative to the forces that would crush and subjugate humanity and in discarding those portions of Christian belief that would seem to play a major part with those other forces in damaging or even destroying human beings. Laurence emphasizes, "I don't think that real liberation comes from turning your back on your whole past or on your ancestral past. Rather it comes through coming to some kind of terms with it....[4]

The resolution in these novels is found in a recognition of the Scriptural concepts of love, service to

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[3]Margaret Laurence, "A Place to Stand On" in Heart of a Stranger (1976; Toronto: Seal, 1980) 6.

[4]Graeme Gibson, "Margaret Laurence" in Eleven Canadian Novelists (Toronto: Anansi, 1973) 203.

others, forgiveness, the unity that results from a respect for one's fellow men and women, and, in the case of Mitchell and Davies especially, the recognition of supernatural power that may well emanate from an impersonal, rather than a personal, Deity. Most of these concepts have been preached so often from pulpits and expounded on so frequently by Sunday School teachers across the land that they have become virtually meaningless as far as everyday life is concerned. The authors under consideration here, however, call for their readers to take a new and fresh look at these ideas. They suggest that in addition to reexamining the cruel and inhibiting concepts that have been associated with Christianity, characters and readers should also re-examine these gentler aspects of the faith. Rather than memorizing and quoting verses about love and compassion, it is necessary to discover practical ways in which these qualities can be implemented to the betterment of one's relationship with God and with other human beings. It is necessary to translate the lofty principles of the Scriptures into practical terms.

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote,

> To allow the hungry man to remain hungry would be blasphemy against God and one's neighbor, for what is nearest to God is precisely the need of one's neighbor. It is for the love of Christ, which belongs as much to the hungry man as to myself, that I share my bread with him and that I share my dwelling with the homeless. If the hungry man does not attain to faith, then the fault falls on those who refused him bread. To provide the hungry man with bread is to prepare the way

for the coming of grace.[5]

Bonhoeffer's words express well the concept of Christian compassion and service that is put forward in these novels. The lifeless cant is to be rejected in favour of a living faith more like that called for by the Christ of the Gospels. Questions arise in these novels as to whether it is possible to make the codes of action advocated in the Gospels part of everyday life, but the idea persists that implementation of such principles should be attempted in order to improve the lives of those who have been the victims of harsh and narrow religious thought. One must keep in mind that it is not merely social action that is called for. The Christianity advocated in the Gospels is more than that, as Mitchell and Davies remind their readers. There is also a dimension of the spiritual that is beyond human understanding but that one must necessarily accept if one is to know the God of power and experience the Divine in all its fullness. The authors of these texts call for the adoption of a faith that minimizes preaching and shows itself in practical applications. All of these writers would probably agree with Robertson Davies who said, "The place to start living a better life is at home instead of using it as a launching pad from which to sally forth to impose virtue

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[5]Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics (1955; New York: Macmillan, 1965) 137.

on other people."[6]

Once the initial anger and frustration concerning organized churches and their doctrines have been expressed, it does not appear to be the aim of these authors, and others like them, to discard totally the contents of the Bible. For many authors who have grown up with its teachings there is a kind of sentimental attachment to the Bible, and its influence can be seen to a large extent in much of Canadian fiction. Modern readers, unlike those of Connor's time, may not be as familiar with the sources of many biblical quotations and allusions, but the references to the Scriptures still persist and form a framework for the novels in which they appear. Thus, the coming of the Holy Spirit and/or a new covenant both of love and of power is evident in the symbols and structure of all four novels in this thesis. A number of characters can be identified with their Scriptural counterparts, and references to Scriptural stories and even to actual verses from the Bible are common. Rather than rejecting the Scriptures, Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies advocate rejection of the distortions that have resulted from the attempts of human beings to interpret this material.

Margaret Laurence has referred to "the past of a col-

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[6]Robertson Davies, "A Talk with Tom Harpur," with Tom Harpur, The Enthusiasms of Robertson Davies, ed. Judith Skelton Grant (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979) 319.

lective cultural memory"[7] that is part of our heritage, and it is clear from these four novels and more than a few others like them that the Judeo-Christian literature and traditions are part of this past. It seems that Laurence may, in fact, be speaking for a number of other Canadian authors when she says,

> There's a great deal....in the Bible which really hits me very hard; it seems to express certain symbolic truths about the human dilemma and about mankind. The expression of various facts of human life and of human life searching for a consciousness greater than its own - that is, in God - some of this moves me in the way that great poetry moves you....there's an enormous emotional inheritance. I am a Christian in the sense of my heritage. I'm capable as most novelists are, perhaps as most people are, of holding two mutually exclusive points of view at the same time, so that I can absolutely detest, intellectually, the thought behind a hymn like "Onward Christian Soldiers", while I still think this is one of the most stirring and wonderful hymns ever written. Part of the terrific impact of things like the hymns derives from the fact that you learned these things in a much earlier era of your life, an era of rock-solid faith. Now you <u>lost</u> this: and part of the impact is not that you believe it, but you mourn your disbelief. This is Eden lost.[8]

John Wadland quotes the American writer Flannery O'Connor as having said, "The Judeo-Christian tradition has formed us in the west; we are bound to it by ties which may often be

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[7]Margaret Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice," <u>The Narrative Voice</u>, ed. John Metcalf (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972) 126.

[8]Donald Cameron, "Margaret Laurence: The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom" in <u>Conversations with Canadian Novelists</u> (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973) 112.

invisible, but which are there nevertheless."[9] The authors considered here give evidence of these invisible bonds that are not easily broken. In _Fifth Business_, Liesl tells Ramsay, "'Oh, this Christianity! Even when people swear they don't believe in it, the fifteen hundred years of Christianity that has made our world is in their bones . . . .'"[10]

The novels explored here echo the belief that lies at the foundation of much of the Christian tradition that it is necessary to have a personal experience with God in order to really know Him. Neither the authors nor the protagonists of these books are content to accept what has been told them about the spiritual aspects of their existence. The quests they are on are individual ones and, as such, are quite different from one another. Mrs. Bentley, spurred on by the hardships of the Great Depression, looks for some way to make the Church and its teachings tolerable for herself and her husband. Rachel tries to possess herself and to come to a realization of what the purpose of her life really is. Brian tries to understand his "feeling" and looks for a more reliable relationship with the Divine. Dunstan tries to come to terms with his guilt and also with spiritual concepts deeper and more mysterious than those explored in the

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[9]John Wadland, "Onward or Backward or Both?", _Journal of Canadian Studies_ 18.2 (Summer 1983): 4.

[10]Davies, _Fifth_ 226.

church of his childhood. His quest is systematic and intellectual, but he ends by affirming the value of that part of religion and Christianity that cannot be understood in human terms. Only after a personal struggle with God and the elements of belief can these characters recognize and accept a Christianity that is relevant to them and to their experiences, a faith that will help them instead of hindering them in their movement toward fulfillment as individuals. Colin Brown says of this experiential approach to spiritual truth,

> Understanding follows experiment and experience, rather than precedes it....We encounter the same approach in the New Testament. Jesus did not hand out his message on a plate. To find out its truth demanded personal commitment.[11]

Their aims are slightly different in each case, but each of these protagonists embarks on his or her quest in order to work toward a fuller understanding of spiritual truth.

Although Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies all seem to advocate a return to a number of the principles called for in the Gospels, the God their characters come to recognize and the system of beliefs they finally accept are not, in most cases, traditional. God, for these characters, may be, as He is for Rachel, a Being who can be addressed in terms of twentieth-century technology. The system of beliefs they adopt may be, like that advocated by Davies, an all-inclusive system, the direct opposite of narrowly-

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[11]Colin Brown, Philosophy and the Christian Faith (1968; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979) 47.

defined traditional concepts of Christianity. Like Sheila Watson, Davies maintains that "...when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too....if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear."[12] When asked if he was "a believer," Robertson Davies answered, "Yes, indeed. But, you know, if I were asked to nail down and defend what it was I believed and why, I would be in a pickle like a lot of people."[13] By saying, "My background and heritage are strongly Christian, although I reserve the right to interpret things in my own way,"[14] Margaret Laurence has also refused to lock herself, or her characters, into a fixed system of belief. This kind of unorthodox thinking and tentative recognition of the Deity is in keeping with the conclusions reached in a number of other Canadian novels. Speaking of the God who has helped his uncle regain his self-esteem and his zest for life, Sandor Hunyadi of Under the Ribs of Death says that He "seemed unusually lighthearted, almost frivolous,"[15] and Sandor's uncle tells him, "'They have made God too sober....I am sure on the eighth

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[12]Sheila Watson, The Double Hook (1959; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966) 15.

[13]Davies, "Harpur" 315.

[14]Margaret Laurence, "Upon a Midnight Clear" in Heart of a Stranger (1976; Toronto: Seal, 1980) 213.

[15]John Marlyn, Under the Ribs of Death (1957; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964) 211.

day He laughed.'"[16] About his encounter with Jesus, Jerome Martell of The Watch That Ends the Night says, "'He wasn't the Jesus of the churches. He wasn't the Jesus who had died for our sins. He was simply a man who had died and risen again."[17] In the same novel, George Stewart comments,

> All our lives we had wanted to belong to something larger than ourselves. We belonged consciously to nothing now except the pattern of our lives and fates. To God, possibly. I am chary of using that much-misused word, but I say honestly that at least I was conscious of His power. Whatever the spirit might be I did not know, but I knew it was there.[18]

The important thing is not that these characters form new ideas about God and faith. Theologians have long recognized the fact that God is far beyond the understanding of human beings anyway. What is important is that after all the questioning and doubting, belief in God is not abandoned. Rather, it is expanded and diversified. The characters in these and many similar texts are no longer locked in a net of strict guidelines about belief and morality that have been handed down through the generations. They have come or are coming to understand God and faith on their own terms, and that is their triumph.

Although the authors considered in this thesis seem to be advocating a return to values based on the teachings of

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[16]Marlyn 212.

[17]Hugh MacLennan, The Watch That Ends the Night (1958; Toronto: Macmillan, 1975) 330.

[18]MacLennan 372.

the Gospels, it is interesting to note that they do not lend their support to evangelical denominations that claim to have the final word on how the Scriptures should be interpreted. As noted in Who Has Seen the Wind, Ab is fervent in his evangelical beliefs, but Mitchell paints a rather drab and sorry picture of his existence. In A Jest of God, the Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn does not offer any solutions to Rachel's problems, and in Fifth Business, Dunstan Ramsay has no desire to embrace the emotional religion of Amasa Dempster or of Joel Surgeoner. Emotion and fervency do not necessarily equal Scriptural truth, according to these authors, and the portraits of fundamentalist churches and their members are scarcely more complimentary than are the descriptions of the mainline churches. Mrs. Bentley, Rachel, Brian, and Dunstan Ramsay are not searching simply for a new denomination with its own dictates and interpretations of Scripture. Organized Christianity, whether it is traditional or evangelical, is seen in twentieth-century English Canadian fiction as a limiting force that cannot successfully meet the social, psychological, and spiritual needs of the people involved with it.

In his book A World of Difference, Thom Hopler includes the following quotation from John Perkins:

> If you take all the verses in the Bible and organize them under themes, the two major themes with the most individual verses supporting them are God's hate for idolatry and God's concern for the

poor and oppressed.[19]

Hopler adds, "You could also turn those two themes into positive statements. God's concern is truth, and God's concern is love."[20] These two subjects that were of such importance to the writers of the Scriptures also constitute the concerns that seem to be foremost in the minds of many twentieth-century Canadian authors. Each novel explored here deals not only with the implementation of practical expressions of love, but also with the question of what truth is. The consideration of false gods and the concern with appearances evident in these novels are both part of this examination of truth, and so is the suggestion that readers should begin to think about the Christian jargon used to communicate the Gospel message. The insistence of these authors that those who do not follow the standard codes of Christian behaviour are, in fact, the real Christians is also part of this theme of truth as is the desire expressed by various characters to comprehend concepts beyond human understanding. Just as views of faith and God are expanded in these texts, so are ideas about God's truth and His standards of wisdom. This is in

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[19]John Perkins, A Quiet Revolution (Waco, TX: Word, 1976) 33. Quoted by Thom Hopler in A World of Difference: Following Christ beyond Your Cultural Walls (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981) 186-87.

[20]Thom Hopler, A World of Difference: Following Christ beyond Your Cultural Walls (Downers Grove, IL: IncerVarsity Press, 1981) 187.

opposition to the prideful belief once widely held by those who adhered to the Christian faith that they were, in fact, in possession of the definitive answers about spirituality. In Canadian fiction, the considerations of truth and wisdom become much less concrete. Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies imply in their novels that there may be much of God's value system that human beings cannot understand.

It should be noted that in spite of the interest in the spiritual that is evident in the novels examined here, they are in no way to be considered theological treatises. W. O. Mitchell does draw attention to the philosopher Berkeley, and much of Davies' work is based on the theories of Carl Jung, but otherwise, there is no direct evidence that these authors have explored deeply theological and philosophical systems of thought either apart from or in these texts. Rather, these writers have chosen to react to what they have observed as the injustices that have been perpetuated by the concepts of religion that are prevalent in the Christian, and specifically the Protestant, sector of this country. It should also be pointed out that the view of traditional religion presented in this thesis and in the novels considered here is necessarily a biased one. Such a system of religious belief, harsh as some of its precepts may be, did help to produce a race of morally upright, hardworking, God-fearing men and women. The guilt, the sense of sin, the fearful idea of a vengeful Jehovah whose decisions cannot be

changed by human pleas or effort, and the adherence to empty forms of religion as proof of one's relationship with God . are also, however, a very real part of this heritage, and it is on these inhibiting and destructive aspects of religious doctrine that Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, Davies, and a number of other Canadian authors have chosen to dwell.

Readers of this thesis should remember that the issues discussed and the conclusions reached in the texts examined here are part of a much larger pattern of thought found in Canadian fiction. Although this is a thesis specifically about the work of Sinclair Ross, Margaret Laurence, W. O. Mitchell, and Robertson Davies, the texts by these authors exemplify the kind of religious thought and criticism that is noticeable in various modern Canadian novels. The adoption of false gods is a prominent idea in Hugh MacLennan's The Watch That Ends the Night:

> This was a time in which you were always meeting people who caught politics just as a person catches religion. It was probably the last time in this century when politics in our country will be evangelical, and if a man was once intensely religious, he was bound to be wide open to a mood like that of the Thirties.[21]

The message of the novels considered here is mirrored by Sheila Watson in The Double Hook. In his introduction to the novel John Grube writes, "...it is not until he [Felix] is called upon to help another human, Lenchen, that he himself begins to realize his priestly function in the commu-

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[21]MacLennan 223-24.

nity...."[22] Here again is the idea that a priest must be more than a preacher. Active service to others like that called for in the Gospels is a prerequisite. _Fifth Business_, the final novel considered in this thesis, was published in 1970, but the criticism of organized Christianity by those who have been raised in, or have at least observed the Christianity practised in, what is loosely referred to as the Calvinist tradition continues. Perhaps the bleakest vision of this kind of Christianity in Canadian literature is that put forward by Margaret Atwood in _The Handmaid's Tale_, published in 1985. This novel provides a grim warning about the consequences of strict adherence to rigid doctrine and biblical practices that are cultural rather than spiritual in character. Working in the same tradition of religious criticism as do the novelists considered in this thesis, she carries their concerns to a horrifying extreme in which a cruel and harsh discipline reigns, and the concept of free will has been completely denied.

Questions about belief, God, and His relationship to humanity are as old as the Christian faith itself, and many are simply, as W. O. Mitchell and Robertson Davies point out, unanswerable. It is well that the authors of the texts considered in this thesis provide for a questioning of their

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[22]John Grube, introduction, _The Double Hook_, by Sheila Watson (1959; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966) 7.

own conclusions. Nevertheless, the ideas put forward in these books represent the perceptions other Canadian authors have of the Christian faith as it relates to life in Canada. It is evident from this study that in Canadian fiction basic Christian values and the idea of God have been questioned but not successfully abandoned. Although the Christian faith in its static and stylized form may be viewed as a dead and limiting force, the four novels studied do suggest that only the forms and restrictions should be discarded. It seems to be the view of Ross, Laurence, Mitchell, and Davies, at least, that the Gospel-based principles underlying the Christian faith still hold much value for the twentieth-century world and should become an even greater part of the Canadian experience.

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