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The Ambiguities of Love in Morley Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved*

1. Introduction: Callaghan's "Certain Perceptions"

Someone, alluding to the title of a famous book by William Empson, once remarked that in this century there are as many types of ambiguity as there once were deadly sins. And the late Allan Bloom, in his indictment of American moral relativism in *The Closing of the American Mind*, stated that the comparative simplicities of falling in love had been supplanted on college campuses by the inherently problematical phenomenon of "having a relationship." Even before postmodernism further complicated such ambiguities as love Morley Callaghan was illuminating its obscurities and making more nebulous its received certainties. But Callaghan's own position on this particular inherent ambiguity of the human situation can be clarified. For it is time to reassess and specify some of the basic mooring points of Callaghan's view of life, especially his basically Catholic and neothomist outlook, once an accepted mainstay of Callaghan criticism, though never as deeply investigated nor as fully supported as it might have been. A consideration of *Such Is My Beloved*, Callaghan's best-known novel, elucidates these bases of his thought, illustrating as well the relationship of his fiction to the biblical tradition exemplified in the Song of Songs,

In the 1960s a critical consensus prevailed about Morley Callaghan's "certain perceptions about human life" to which he claimed a writer inevitably returns (Weaver, 134). Such commentators as F. W. Watt, Desmond Pacey, and Victor Hoar agreed that Callaghan's fiction until the end of the 1920s had shown the strong influence of naturalism or determinism. Whether

attributed to the influence of Hemingway (with whom he had a friendship in the 20s) or to the impact of the social sciences or to the Freudian or Marxist account of the individual's place in society, Callaghan's earliest work was seen as displaying people at the mercy of forces larger than themselves. But there was also agreement that by the time of *Such Is My Beloved* Callaghan "gave up," as Pacey put it, "the negative futility that marked the early novels... and concentrated upon the spiritual lives of his characters rather than upon their physical appetites" (691).

Watt and Pacey especially contended that Callaghan turned to what is variously referred to as individualism or personalism or Christian humanism. As Hugo McPherson had earlier maintained, Callaghan "became, in short, a religious writer" (Conron, 60) who explored the relation between two worlds, one empirical and the other spiritual. In this vein Pacey claimed that Callaghan portrayed the individual soul as defeated or destroyed on earth, but nonetheless achieving a triumph not of this world. As Jacques Maritain, whose thought was highly regarded by Callaghan, wrote, society is indirectly subordinate "to the perfect fulfilment of the person and his supra-temporal aspirations." Each person transcends the common good of society: "A single human soul is more worth than the whole universe of bodies and material goods. There is nothing above the human soul except God" (*Rights of Man*, 11).

By the late 1970s, however, what had previously been so readily a matter of consensus began to be called into question. D. J. Dooley stated that other evidence in the novels of the 1930s mitigated this theme of the individual in opposition to society. Turning to *The Loved and the Lost* (1951), Dooley maintained that Callaghan had written "a very paradoxical novel," leaving us "reflecting on questions rather than answers" (77). Larry McDonald went further. He argued that "Callaghan criticism is mired in the slough of Christian personalism" (77) and that the dualistic metaphysic that many critics had foisted on his work must be rejected. After a close examination of Callaghan's earliest fiction, McDonald suggested that the focus was on the fulfilment of human potential developed in and through time, not on Christian redemption: "there are no values or visitations of grace from outside of time" (84). For Callaghan, human nature is monistic; in his view of life there is "no such thing as an opposition between the spiritual and the carnal" (83).

What critical agreement remains includes recognition of Callaghan's novels

of the 1930s as his finest achievement. Among them *Such Is My Beloved* (to cite the jacket copy of the 1989 New Canadian Library edition) "is widely considered Callaghan's finest novel." It has also been generally agreed that beginning with that novel of 1934 a change took place in Callaghan's fiction, usually attributed to the influence of Jacques Maritain, who was teaching in Toronto at that time (see Kernan, 88-89). In 1951 Callaghan recounted his excitement at Martain's presence at Toronto's Medieval Institute almost two decades earlier: "I went around saying, 'Jacques Maritain is in town,' with a beaming smile" ("It Was News," 17). But Callaghan, only recently returned from Paris, was dismayed that his enthusiasm was largely unshared in Toronto: "Maritain was a world figure everywhere but in my home town" ("It Was News," 18). Callaghan had learned of course that the mind and spirit of Thomas Aquinas had shaped the thinking of Joyce and Dante. But he was keen to discover more about the neglected thirteenth century, almost obscured in Ontario education by claims made about the Renaissance.

The terms of Callaghan's admiration for Maritain are lavish and unrestrained. He claimed that Maritain's presence had put the Medieval Institute "on the world stage intellectually," citing T. S. Eliot's comment that Maritain was "one of the great intellectual forces in Europe" ("It Was News," 17). The dedication of *Such is My Beloved* states in simple homage: "To those times with M. in the winter of 1933." And, until the new edition of 1989 dropped it, the New Canadian Library edition supplied the clue for M's identity by printing on the back cover Maritain's comment: "I have been profoundly touched by the absolute sincerity of this very moving book." The French philosopher apparently held the Canadian writer in equal esteem. The two men, and a few others (in particular, Manny Chapman, a convert to Catholicism from Judaism), met frequently during 1933 to eat together, drink wine, and socialize at the Callaghan apartment on Avenue Road.[1]

2. The Two Conflicting Realms

In his memoir *That Summer in Paris*, renowned for its accounts of his associations with Fitzgerald and Hemingway in Paris in 1929 (and especially for Callaghan's "boxing match" with the latter), Callaghan comments that "Christian artists were finding new dignity and spiritual adventure in the neo-Thomism of Jacques Maritain," perhaps having in mind Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*, originally published in Paris in 1920.[2] He continues: "My own problem was to relate a Christian enlightenment to some timeless

process of becoming" (94), thereby suggesting his (at least intellectual) attempt to reconcile dualities, and perhaps the two conflicting realms of the temporal and the eternal. Regardless of whether Callaghan as a man actually wrestled with opposing dualisms, or having wrestled with them, resolved them, his fiction implies an author whose fiction, far from presenting a monistic view of harmonious human nature, deals with precisely such opposition and conflict.

Even if the implied author views the effort to resolve this struggle ironically, his protagonist in *Such Is My Beloved,* Father Stephen Dowling, attempts to harmonize the opposition between eternity and time, church and world, divine and human. His final failure to achieve a reconciliation on earth may be an otherworldly triumph, however ironically portrayed by the impersonal narrator. But even without making any assertion about whether Callaghan as author believes in an ultimate metaphysical dualism, it is still possible to quarrel with McPherson's judgment: "Thus though Father Dowling has failed by all temporal standards in his quest, he has, in the best sense of the Christian faith, triumphed" (67). For there remains something troubling and problematic in a view that dictates the continuation and opposition of two realms, unable finally to be harmonized.

George Woodcock remarked that "a whole essay could be written on the significance of the cathedrals which appear at crucial points in every novel that Callaghan wrote" (75), and went on to state that the "ambiguous symbolism of the Cathedral, particularly in *Such Is My Beloved,* extends this dichotomy [between moral man and immoral society] into the world of religion" (82). A part—though not the "whole"—of this present essay examines Father Dowling's changing view of the Cathedral in the novel as indicator of his changing attitude towards the church in the world, and its relation to the transcendent.

Put in the terms of H. Richard Niebuhr in his classic book *Christ and Culture,* Dowling begins, in his unchallenged idealism and innocence, in something like the position of the "cultural" or "synthesist" Christian who sees no opposition between Christ and Culture, no strain or tension between God and the world. One of the great virtues of Niebuhr's typology lies in its setting forth a range of possibilities between the extremes of monism and dualism. His "Christ of Culture" position (that of the "cultural" Christian) has it that Christian life is simply the highest expression of life in culture; the "Christ Above Culture" type (the "synthesist") views God

as ordering both the natural and the supernatural such that the two realms are harmoniously related in a hierarchical structure. Niebuhr describes Aquinas as "probably the greatest of all the synthesists in Christian history" (128), while claiming that the neothomist synthesis sought by Leo XIII and others "is not the synthesis of Christ with present culture, but the re-establishment of the philosophy and institutions of another culture" (139). This, he declares, is Christianity "of the cultural sort," while the synthetic answer is absent from modern culture because of the prevailing understanding either of Christ or of culture.

At the outset of the novel, as Dowling returns to the rectory from a pastoral visit, he is planning the next Sunday's sermon, "another powerful discourse on the building of a society on Christian principles" (4). Dowling smiles to himself as he sees the crowds coming out of the theatres. He turns the corner "mechanically," not bothering to look up to see the Cathedral spire, taking for granted the place of his church within society. The cathedral, both unimpressive to visitors and unknown to most inhabitants, is undistinguished in relation to its surroundings—"it was really a Protestant city."[3] The parish has become poor, while the church "had been in that neighbourhood for so long it now just seemed a part of an old city block" (37). From any perspective, the church is integrated into the city, neither in conflict with it nor standing apart from it.

After first meeting the prostitutes, Midge and Ronnie, Dowling returns to his room, continuing to think of these "two girls in my own parish and in a hotel I could almost see from my window" (7). When he thrusts his face against the window pane in the attempt to see "the place where he knew the hotel was," his vision is blurred by "the water that had streamed down the window." Later the same night, returning home again after visiting the hotel room, Dowling sees this time the Cathedral spire as well as the building itself, "hemmed in closely by office buildings and warehouses and always dirtied by city soot, and with the roof now covered by snow and moonlight shining on the white slope" (15). His reaction to this juxtaposition of the church with the other city buildings is a feeling of "fresh full contentment."

Some days later, after Dowling's second visit to see them, one of the prostitutes, Midge, looks out through the frosted glass of her hotel window after midnight, thinking of the priest. But his domain remains inaccessible to her: "The church was just on the other side of the block. But no matter how she strained her neck she could not see the spire" (30). At the same time Midge,

having chased away a college boy who asked her to dance for him, thinks that the priest would have been pleased by her reaction, making it "more likely that he would give her money the next time he came he came to the hotel" (30). She lacks his sense of the connection between the church and the rest of the world, while he misinterprets what, from her perspective, is implied in giving her money.

On the next visit Dowling, with twelve dollars borrowed from his Marxist friend, Charlie Stewart, hurries along the street, engrossed in a prayer of thanks as he goes: "as he looked up eagerly at the stars he passed right by the Cathedral and kept on going around the block to the hotel" (45). Dowling slips the money under a cloth on the dresser, "with a strangely diffident apologetic nod" (47), and alone in the room with Midge, falls asleep with her. Though we are told that Midge is lying on the bed, hoping that Dowling will "come over here and sit beside me," we do not know where he ends up after he leaves his chair to put the money on the dresser. Callaghan leaves it in doubt as to whether he joins Midge on the bed, or whether he returns to the chair.

After hearing the confession of the university student who fears the loss of his faith, and who has twice been to one of the neighbourhood prostitutes, Father Dowling thinks of "how united was all the life of his congregation, students, the mothers and fathers of students, prostitutes, priests, the rich and the poor who passed girls on the street and desired them" (76). He goes on to attribute a purpose to the lives of the girls, in a typical naively idealistic (or outrageously sexist) justification, because "it was certainly better for that boy to have been with Ronnie or Midge than some pure young girl" (77). While making his way from his house to the hotel in the spring he is filled with fond thoughts: "He felt he would rather be here in the city and at the Cathedral than any place else on earth, for here he was at home in the midst of his own people" (58). Father Dowling's collision with his Bishop is brought about by his attempt to carry out and act on this conjunction of his church with the prostitutes' lives, an effort to unite the whole of what he understands to be his parish. In his misguided enthusiasm Dowling hopes that by taking Midge and Ronnie to the Robisons' house he will enlist his wealthy parishioners' sympathy for them and raise their prospects. The fiasco ends with angry words, bringing Dowling's recognition of the incommensurability of the social and economic (and spiritual too) worlds of the Robisons and the prostitutes. His disillusionment with these parishioners,

up to now taken by him as exemplary Christians, causes a revised attitude to the church, evident in his changed reaction to the Cathedral's spire:

> Even when he reached the sidewalk, he kept glaring back at the [Robisons'] house, and as he walked, his anger and disgust alternated so sharply that he did not realize he was back at the Cathedral till he looked up and saw the spire and saw, too, the cross at the peak thrust up against the stars and felt no sudden affection but just a cool disgust, as if the church no longer belonged to him. (94)

Back in his room Dowling looks out over the city at the buildings and the crowds, thinking of Midge and Ronnie. The chapter ends: "He felt full of love for them and sometimes he looked up at the stars" (96). By now, in Niebuhrian terms, Dowling has moved away from his earlier "cultural" or "synthetic" Christianity with its uncomplicated relationship between church and world to a more radical or dualist position, similar to Niebuhr's "Christ Against Culture" type where the clearcut tension between God and world leads to a withdrawal from an ungodly culture. Earlier the church among the office buildings signified the redeeming presence of God in a world seen as potentially sacred in all its aspects and into which the church is fully integrated.

Initially Dowling had no need to look beyond the world for a symbol of sacred transcendence. The church spire is taken for granted as a temporal symbol of the sacred, fitting as it does so comfortably amidst the surrounding warehouses and office buildings. Later the Cathedral is seen as part of the temporal realm, separate from the eternal. Now Dowling searches beyond the temporal for a correlate of the sacred, most often finding it in the stars, whether generally symbolizing, as is common to mythology and folklore universally, the spirit and the eternal, or representative of human souls.

3. The Song of Songs: Love and the Sacred

Whether read straightforwardly as an instance of the pre-1960s genre "Catholic novel," even when that means "informed by Catholic sensibility or vision which is not easily restated in terms of doctrine" (Gerhart, 188), or as an ironic depiction (perhaps reminiscent of Kafka or Camus) of the impossibilities of conventional religious faith in the twentieth century, still *Such Is My Beloved* shows a collision between two realms rather than a monistic vision. For the contemporary reader it may be no more than the exemplification of Herman Melville's dictum that anyone who tries to apply

literally the teachings of the New Testament ends up in the jail or the psychiatric hospital. Or, as the author himself has suggested of his work in general, *Such Is My Beloved* may be read as an investigation of the plight of innocence, the partial subject of his talk with Robert Weaver:

> Innocence has always fascinated me. There's a very thin borderline between innocence and crime... there's a very thin line there because the saint in his own way has a kind of monstrous egotism. And the great criminal has a monstrous egotism. The saint pits himself against the whole world... which he calls, of course, usually the work of Satan. But the great criminal also puts himself against the world and the laws of society.4 (135)

Callaghan made a similar comment about his entire oeuvre in a television program in 1971: "The whole point of all my work, in a sense, has been a kind of rejection of the conception of innocence" (Harcourt and Price). At the same time he made another generalizing declaration about the theme of love in his fiction: "All [my] stories are love stories—short stories or novels, they deal with some aspect of love, or the failure of love—I suppose mainly about the failure of love." In some respects what Callaghan does in *Such Is My Beloved* is to move the priest's initial concern for the salvation of the souls of Midge and Ronnie into an adjacent realm where love becomes the transcendent value to be preserved in a hostile environment. In this connection to examine the Song of Songs from the Hebrew Scriptures, whether as used by the author as an epigraph for the novel, by the protagonist as a text for a sermon, or by a commentator as an heuristic device for interpretation, is instructive and illuminating. In fact, the place of that pagan hymn to love within the canon of the Bible and the question of what hermeneutic to employ upon it is not unlike the problem presented by Callaghan's novel itself. The uncertain relation of human love to the sacred—or better, the possibility of sacralizing human love—is (clearly) at issue in either case.

After Midge and Ronnie have been run out of town, and Easter passes, Dowling withdraws increasingly into an interior world—"he heard the noises from people moving in the house, but these sounds now did not interest him at all" (139)—as he meditates on love, planning his commentary on the Song of Songs. Dowling wears an "expression of detached sadness" during a visit from Charlie Stewart; his eyes are dulled by "that detached, depressed, heavy stillness" (140-41). His disengagement from society is complete when he is sent to the psychiatric hospital by the lake. With the patients sitting in the sun as if they were guests at a garden party

waiting to be served, there occurs a bitter parody and reversal of the pastoral imagery of the Song of Songs where the garden is a refuge from the world. At the hospital, held "by an absolute stillness within him" (142), Dowling continues to pray in this idyllic setting as he looks at "the new ploughed land" and the "rich brown fertile soil." Unable to do anything more to affect their material condition, Dowling concludes by offering up his insanity as a sacrifice for the souls of the girls. In the novel's concluding lines three stars appear above the water: "His love seemed suddenly to be as steadfast as those stars, as wide as the water, and still flowing within him like the cold smooth waves still rolling on the shore" (144).

Callaghan's epigraph for his novel is the Song of Songs 8:7: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it [i.e., he] would utterly be contemned [i.e., despised]." Francis Landy comments that this verse, especially its latter half, is "ironic": "In the eyes of the world, to give one's entire fortune for love is folly; from the perspective of the Song, in which riches are ultimately worthless, it is folly" (Alter and Kermode, 318). The double meaning here is, first, that the lover who forsakes wealth for the sake of love is regarded by the world as a fool and, second, that the rich person cannot purchase love—as the title of the Beatles' song put it, "Can't Buy Me Love." From the perspective of the wealthy Robisons, Father Dowling is delusional, someone who throws everything away for the sake of a couple of prostitutes. And, in the view of his Bishop, about to launch (with compounded incongruity) what is termed a "Charity Drive," and fearful of the church's reputation if a scandal should erupt, Dowling's course of action is not expedient. From the viewpoint of Dowling, where love is manifest in the concreteness of relationships, materialism is more spiritually imperilling than prostitution: "All around us there are all kinds of people prostituting their souls and their principles for money" (132).

The title, *Such Is My Beloved*, is also taken from the book in the Hebrew Scriptures known as the Song of Solomon, the Song of Songs, or the Canticle of Canticles. The Douay translation of the last verse of chapter five has the words "Such is My beloved" (whereas the King James and Revised Standard versions have "This is my beloved"). Both epigraph and title make explicit the connection between the novel and the scriptures, inexplicably not much examined by critics. Given these two quotations from the same biblical book, to say nothing of other thematic connections, as well as Dowling's use

of the book, the relations between Callaghan's novel and the Song of Songs need attention.

The phrase "such is my beloved" occurs in the Song at the end of a chapter in which a bride has described her Beloved to a group of bystanders. She tells them, in a complete catalogue of his physical features, ranging all the way from head to toe, about his hair, his complexion, his eyes, his cheeks, his lips, his hands, his belly, and his legs. She concludes: "His conversation is sweetness itself, he is altogether loveable. Such is my beloved, such is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (5:16). Since here the words are spoken by a woman of the man she loves, probably the line is most applicable to Midge's attitude towards the priest who befriends her and Ronnie, Father Stephen Dowling.

Like the woman of the Song of Songs, Midge (whose name means "gnat" or, more positively, "tiny person") is referred to several times in the novel as "dark": she is "the little, dark one with the round brown eyes" (9); she is "the little dark girl" (13); and as Dowling describes her to Charlie's girlfriend, Pauline, Midge is "dark with brown eyes" (55). Like the woman in the Song of Songs who is "dark and comely" (1:5), and therefore probably from the country, Midge is an outsider in Toronto. Her darkness is the antithesis of the conventional fair beauty of the city. As a recent commentator on the Song explains:

> In the Pastoral, courtly tradition, darkness of skin is ambivalent, while the conventional beauty is fair.... A white complexion is delicate, unspoilt; and readily merges with the symbolism of whiteness as purity. The unspoilt, delicate girl is virginal, carefully raised within society to await her husband. The dark girl—whether Theocritus' "sunburnt Syrian," Virgil's Amyntas or Menalcas, or the "nut brown maid"—is available, and consequently less idealised and more enticing. (Landy, 144)

The conventional beauty of the city is perhaps represented in James Robison's "two fine daughters" (39), or, even more, by Robison's wife, who is contrasted with Midge and Ronnie so dramatically when Dowling takes the girls to their home. On that occasion, Mrs. Robison is described as having "slender white hands," "beautiful white streaks in her hair," and skin that is "soft and pink" (90). By contrast, Midge is a working-class girl from Montreal, one of a dozen children, and of French-Canadian background, to say nothing of her being a prostitute and not the wife of a prominent lawyer.

Like the bride in the Song of Songs, Midge catalogues her "Beloved's"

features, recalling Dowling's face, hair, lips, and hands, while she sits in her prison cell following her arrest:

> And at last there floated into her thoughts the face of Father Dowling. She liked to think of his face now, his thick hair, and the gentleness in his smile. She began, too, to think of his big, soft strong hands as if they might hold her and strengthen her even as these thoughts were strengthening her. (112)

Callaghan's use of the phrase "such is my beloved" in his title echoes the New Testament pronouncement at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River: "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).[5] That Father Dowling may be like Jesus is suggested in his presiding at a "last supper" of wine and sandwiches the night before the "betrayal" of Midge and Ronnie by Robison (Judas) to the Bishop (Pilate). The title phrase may also imply that Dowling is Christ-like in his befriending two prostitutes for whom he sacrifices himself. Bishop Foley comes close to stumbling on the nature and origins of Dowling's love for the two women. After his interview with Father Dowling Bishop Foley feels that the priest's love for them became "too concrete." While musing about this, and searching for "the conception expressed in the image," he seeks a suitable abstraction by which to grasp the problem: "From the word to the flesh, the word to the flesh, from the general to the particular, the word made flesh, no, no, nonsense" (135). At this moment the Bishop almost forces himself to conclude that his priest's love for the two prostitutes is like God's love for all humanity, made particular and concrete in the Word become flesh, as described in the opening words of the Fourth Gospel. But he backs away and negates it, effectively denying the very good news he is supposed to uphold and proclaim.

In the same CBC television program mentioned earlier Callaghan expressed his own doubts as to whether you "can love generally, without loving concretely." Maritain, in his *True Humanism*, describes what he terms theocentric humanism, "the humanism of the Incarnation." Quoting from his own earlier work Maritain continues to the effect that the saint cherishes other creatures "as loved by God, and made by Him as fair and worthy of our love. For to love a being in and for God is not to treat them as a mere means or a mere occasion for loving God, but to love and cherish their being as an end, because it *merits* love..." (*The Degrees of Knowledge* [1937], as cited in *True Humanism*, 65).

Throughout the novel Father Dowling becomes increasingly an apologist for divine love, especially through his own meditation and preaching on the

Song of Songs. Early in the novel he believed that "his feeling for the girls was so intense it must surely partake of the nature of the divine love" (16), perhaps an instance of dangerous naivete. Perhaps he is only confusing erotic intensity with religious devotion; perhaps he is sacralizing human love; or, perhaps Dowling recognizes that he cannot love merely instrumentally—that love must be end and not means. In the endeavour to love Midge and Ronnie "for themselves," as he puts it, Dowling is an example of incarnational humanism. After the collision with his bishop and parishioners that kind of love becomes a transcendent value.

Reading his Bible Dowling "understood some of the secret rich feeling of this love song, sung so marvellously that it transcended human love and become divine" (78). When he preaches on the Song he makes it a song "of a love that all people ought to have for one another" (78). And, closing that sermon, he quotes the same words that Callaghan inscribes at the outset of the novel: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Awaiting his Bishop's decision about the nature of the discipline to be imposed on him, Dowling determines to write a commentary on the Song of Songs with the purpose of showing "how human love may transcend all earthly things" (139). At the end, as he watches "the soft rise and enormous flow toward him" of the waves of the lake, one assumes that his own love has not been quenched, however broken and disordered his mind might be.

Even in the brief concluding chapter, after Dowling realizes and accepts his "insanity," he still hopes for periods of clarity in which to go on with his commentary on the Song of Songs. Here, at the hospital outside the city by the lake, amidst vistas of "a wide lawn with new green spring grass," of patients talking and bowing to each other "as if it were a great garden party to which they had all been invited," and adjacent to "new ploughed land" with its "rich brown fertile soil, heavy and dark and moist," Dowling has moved, like the lovers in the Song of Songs, from the city to the countryside (see Song of Songs 2:8, 5:1, and 6:2). Francis Landy writes perceptively about what he terms "the process of fusion and differentiation" in the Song of Songs. He describes the theme of the Song as "the paradise that only exists in the world through being inaccessible to it, or is only accessible outside its limits, through imaginative transcendence" (272). As he points out—and Callaghan's theme bears similarities—love is as strong as death, but love is also like death, threatening dissolution and desolation. Whatever psychic or spiritual or amorous union or integration the priest achieves with the two

women is accompanied by his exile from the church and the city—those two communities he sought to unite and serve—and by the disintegration of his reason.

4. Conclusion: Incarnational Humanism

Three months before his death St. Thomas Aquinas had a powerfully transformative experience, resulting in his abandoning the writing of his great *Summa*: "Such things have been revealed to me that everything I have written seems to me rubbish" (Maritain, *Angel of the Schools*, 26). At times Aquinas was dazed, and was generally unable to teach or write. It has been variously suggested that he suffered a nervous breakdown, a stroke, or exhaustion. It may have been that he experienced, either as cause or result of his physical condition, a mystical experience. During his final two weeks, when it was known that his death was near, Thomas was asked for a memorial. Accordingly, he dictated to the monks at Fossanova a brief commentary on the Song of Songs (Maritain, *Angel of the Schools*, 27; cf. Weisheipl, 326). Though this deathbed commentary has not survived, this poignant account of its origins, in part derived from William of Tocco, has been described by Aquinas' most influential biographer as "a persistent view" (Weisheipl, 326).

Stephen B. Boyd has conjectured that "his preoccupation with the erotic imagery of the Song" may be connected with Thomas's "disillusionment with his intellectual work." Aquinas had previously "believed that the repression of sexual energy/passion was necessary to vitalize one's intellectual life." But his climactic realization, a vision of God that infused him with erotic passion, Boyd suggests, was "a glimpse of a different kind of sexuality and its possibility to enrich life and draw one to God" (8). Other recent commentators on the relationship between sex and religion have gone further. James B. Nelson in *The Intimate Connection*, drawing on Paul Ricoeur, argues that we are now experiencing a renewed sense of the spiritual power of sexual expression. No longer is spirituality to be thought of as something transcending sexuality. Instead there is, exactly as Father Dowling's incarnational humanism would have it, the possibility for human love to become divine love. For Nelson states that "in the depths of friendship with another human being, I literally do experience the friendship of God." More emphatically, he declares that this experience, not just analogous to an experience of God, or even embodying divine love, "*is* God." The situation of Thomas's last days, especially as elaborated in Boyd's interpretation of it, is

strikingly close to that of Father Stephen Dowling at the end of *Such Is My Beloved.* Both of them experience the tremendous power of some transcendent force, perhaps of love, to overturn one's taken-for-granted world, leading to the abandonment of life as previously lived and known. In addition to whatever else he might have learned from Jacques Maritain's neothomism, Morley Callaghan through his acquaintance with Maritain might have been (in fact, probably was) prompted towards imagining fictional parallels to the life of Thomas. After all, Maritain had published his biography of Thomas in Paris in 1930, just three years earlier, with the translation into English following in 1931. Given the frequency of their meetings and the interest Callaghan showed in Maritain's ideas, Aquinas' life and thought would have been a likely topic of conversation between them.[6]

While Maritain's influence was widely accepted in Callaghan criticism a generation ago, recent commentators have not much heeded the direct impact of Maritain's ideas on Callaghan or his specific borrowings from Maritain's work.[7] But the two men obviously had shared interests in the perils and possibilities of sainthood, a subject that comes up frequently in Maritain's writing. Callaghan amply demonstrates here and in his other fiction his own capacities not just to use the thought of someone like the Catholic philosopher Maritain but to project himself imaginatively and prophetically into the mind of a saint or an innocent. In *Such Is My Beloved* (and in *A Time for Judas* too) Callaghan shows how new light can be shed on an ancient biblical text by a modern author's imaginative reflections. *Such Is My Beloved,* now more than a half-century old, takes on fresh meaning when viewed in terms of contemporary scholarship on the Song of Songs, on the life of Aquinas, and on the relationship between human sexuality and spirituality.

Finally, attempts to disengage Callaghan's literary imagination from the basic tenets of an essentially Catholic and neothomist outlook, nourished in particular by Jacques Maritain's influence, are misguided. To ignore or disclaim the significance of Callaghan's probing reflections on biblical materials (at least to judge from the authority of the Song of Songs for *Such Is My Beloved*), is likewise erroneous. But Callaghan's great achievement, it seems to me, is to employ these various resources neither towards the ultimate dichotomization of two conflicting realms (an absolute dualism) nor towards the utter collapse of these two domains—the profane and the sacred, the temporal and the eternal, the carnal and the spiritual—into a

harmonious but exclusive monism of either radical immanence or total transcendence. Somewhere in the ambiguous territory between these extremities Morley Callaghan stakes out the possibility of an incarnational humanism envisaging a more sophisticated and redemptive relationship between the two realms.

NOTES

[1] I am indebted to Professor Gary Boire of Wilfrid Laurier University, author of a forthcoming biography of Callaghan, for generously sharing information about Callaghan's Catholicism, his relationship with Maritain, and the Toronto background to Callaghan's fiction.

[2] The revival of Thomism began in 1879 with an encyclical by Pope Leo XIII. In 1914, with the approval of Pope Pius X, twenty-four propositions were published embodying the essential points of Thomas's philosophy, including characterizations of the immortal soul as capable of existing apart from the body and as the source of life and perfection (see *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8, 114).

[3] This "Protestant city" of the novel is of course recognizable as Toronto, though Callaghan nowhere explicitly states it. Possibly the Roman Catholic Cathedral of the story is modelled on St. Michael's while the psychiatric hospital by the lake is based on the private institution that once existed west of Toronto on Lakeshore Boulevard. One of this journal's assessors for this essay in manuscript form suggested—though I think these possibilities less likely—St. Basil's Church on Clover Hill and the psychiatric hospital in Whitby, Ontario as the originals for Callaghan's novel.

[4] Jacques Maritain writes: "The saints always amaze us. Their virtues are freer than those of a merely virtuous man. Now and again, in circumstances outwardly alike, they act quite differently from the way in which a merely virtuous man acts. ... They have their own kind of mean, their own kinds of standards. But they are valid only for each one of them" (*Existence and the Existent* [New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1966], 55).

[5] Though echoing more directly the Song of Songs 5:5, the baptismal pronouncement is usually taken as a quotation of (or at least an allusion to) Isaiah 42:1, "Behold my servant whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my spirit delighteth," and/or Isaiah 49:3, "Thou art my servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified." The prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures, rather than the Song of Songs, are considered more likely (because more authoritative) source material for the author of the First Gospel. It is only through a later process of allegorization that the Beloved of the Song is seen to stand for Christ as bridegroom of the Church.

[6] *Le Docteur Angelique* (Paris: Desclee, 1930). The English translation appeared a year later as *St. Thomas Aquinas, Angel of the Schools*, trans J. F. Scanlan (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931). Maritain's book has the same details of Aquinas's last days as appear in Weisheipl's authoritative biography (see *Angel of the Schools*, 26-27).

[7] Though see the interview with Callaghan found in Matt Cohen, "Morley's Coy Mythtress," *Books in Canada* (July 1975), 3-5; also the general discussion in Barbara

Helen Pell, "Faith and Fiction: The Novels of Callaghan and Hood," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18:2 (Summer 1983): 5-17; and, the consideration of *They Shall Inherit the Earth* in John J. O'Connor, "Fraternal Twins: The Impact of Jacques Maritain on Callaghan and Charbonneau," *Mosaic* 14:2 (Spring 1981): 145-63.

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