THE GIFT OF GRACE

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FROM HIS FIRST NOVEL, Morley Callaghan appears a prophet of gloom. He writes almost exclusively about the people on the edge of society: about the non-conformist, the negro, the alcoholic, the prostitute, the criminal. Most of them are doomed to destruction. With one or two exceptions, those who survive have little left beyond their will to live.

How can this hell he creates be reconciled with Callaghan's own statement in *That Summer in Paris*: "My problem was to relate a Christian enlightenment to some timeless process of becoming"? His intention appears to be the examination of Christian faith as it impinges on human existence in this world, not in the finality of the world hereafter. The basic message of Christianity is the good news of redemption from evil as presented in the person of Jesus Christ. Implied in this theme are the beliefs that man has responsibility for his own situation, however desperate, that man must sincerely desire to change his life, and that he is dependent on the grace of God to effect such change. Callaghan's concern with the redemptive process is illustrated by his use of the Biblical themes of the prodigal or lost son, of the lost sheep, and of Lazarus. All these present in some way the return to life from death or from a state analogous to death.

If redemption has human significance, each man must be able to choose regeneration and life or to refuse it. The concept of free will appears critical for Callaghan's religious position. His characters are the ideal testing ground since they represent the most restricted and hopeless elements in society. Many of his novels explore the possibility of free will and individual responsibility, both through an apparent acceptance of naturalism in his early novels, and later through an examination of communism.

A naturalistic determinism dominates *Strange Fugitive*, Callaghan's first novel. Harry Trotter is at once a helpless victim of the forces driving him and a willing accomplice in avoiding a sense of responsibility for his own fate. His violent death seems inevitable. But he yearns for Vera and the world where relationships were true and right, where he gained status by being the man of the household.

That is, he aspires to a position of responsibility, however limited. His longing for Vera and his first tentative move toward her when he realizes he may face death are evidence of Callaghan's uneasiness in the naturalistic deterministic position, an uneasiness borne out by his later novels. Michael Aikenhead in *They Shall Inherit the Earth* wrestles with his sense of guilt over Dave Choate's drowning by trying to blame the tragedy on unsatisfactory family relationships and on his father as pivotal in them. Nevertheless in his ultimate assumption of responsibility, he denies the validity of total determinism.

After his earliest novels, Callaghan rejects a deterministic position, developing his view of a limited free will against the challenge of communism. Charlie Stewart of *Such Is My Beloved* and William Johnson of *They Shall Inherit the Earth* both try to explain prostitution in purely economic terms. The only solution they can offer is revolution and the ensuing radical social change. They deny the value of the individual. William Johnson says of Anna Prychoda: "She's an illustration of a larger issue and you can't stop to worry about her." Michael's intervention in Huck Farr's seduction of Anna indicates his sense of responsibility toward her as an individual, and implies his rejection of an impersonal radical position.

In *A Passion in Rome*, Callaghan through Sam Raymond's words relates the sense of personal worth to eternity and God:

> I'm telling you, the Christian, about resurrection . . . Out of the ruins of her life. That look that comes on her face. Something in her spirit survives. It's got to survive. It's the divine spark.

Despite the emphasis Callaghan places on external pressures which compel certain sorts of behaviour, he affirms that the individual can and does choose his way. Michael argues with Nathanael Benjamin that "If the passions overwhelm you you can hardly be free." Although he angrily rejects Benjamin's reply — "You might be just free enough to have just a little influence on whatever happens" — yet he finds Benjamin's outlook on life so attractive that finally Anna's jealousy is aroused.

Callaghan maintains a tension, however, between a man's sense of responsibility and the social pressures which denude him of it. Society, he recognizes, tends to destroy the sense of individual worth: through the economic forces leading Ronnie and Midge to prostitution, through the conflicts destroying the Aikenhead family, through the refusal of society to support Kip Caley's efforts at reform, through the prejudices against non-conformists such as Peggy Sander-

son and against negroes, through the injustices of public opinion destroying Harry Lane's reputation, and finally through the circumstances forcing Anna Connel into dissolution.

The collective pressures toward evil are somewhat moderated through social conformity and justice, which create a beautiful pattern paralleling that of natural law. Michael Aikenhead, on his hunting trip, understands that the death of one creature brings life for another. Father Dowling sees the role of the two prostitutes as scapegoats so that society can maintain the health of its structure. Society, like nature, subordinates the welfare of the individual to that of the whole. In both, the only expectation can be death. The social process proves almost as deterministic as naturalism and is as destructive of individual worth. Jim McAlpine describes social rules as being rather like a hockey game: "Anything that breaks the pattern is bad. And Peggy breaks up the pattern."

SINCE NO PERSON can totally escape from society, each is implicated in the evil of its injustices. He participates in guilt just by being what he is. Scotty comes in Harry's delirium to reproach him: "If you weren't like you are, would I have become what I am?" Sam Raymond sums up: "The whole human race hasn't had any innocence for about twenty-five thousand years." In this sense, man is involved in original sin and is under moral judgment.

Despite his freedom of choice, man's predicament is so desperate that he may find his own powers inadequate to effect a radical change. Without the impetus of an outside force, he may in effect be enslaved by society and by his own inadequate nature. All he can expect is the inexorable justice of nature, where his death is part of the pattern and where his individuality is irrelevant. Grace is therefore essential for his redemption. By the end of *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, Michael in his weakness cries out for the mercy that has already come to him unrecognized in the person of Anna:

> I only know that Anna will have to die, and it won't be unjust. But I don't want justice. Who on this earth ever really wanted justice? . . . My God, have pity on me. I don't want justice, I want mercy. Have pity on me.

Insight comes, as to Michael, in moments of crisis. Harry Lane gains understanding in the nightmare of temporary paralysis. Anna Connel submits to Sam's

creative will only after she has become incapacitated by her terror of solitude. Michael Aikenhead is reaching toward this concept when he tells Anna: "They say suffering draws men to God . . . Suffer and you have a chance of finding God."

To accept regenerative mercy, man must not only desire it, he must acknowledge his own guilt, both as an individual and as a member of society. It is only after Andrew and Michael Aikenhead both admit their involvement in Dave's drowning that a meaningful relation is possible, for the process of shifting blame divides them. Harry Lane must finally admit that, despite his legal innocence, his personality and social position invited Scotty both to envy and to exploit him, and that therefore he too bore moral guilt for the tragedy.

Recognition of guilt and desire for change open the way for a new quality in relationships. Harry Lane's life and feelings for others have been distorted by his obsession for proving himself innocent before society. Yet in the crisis at the hospital and in the final vulnerability of Mike Kon, Harry understands that innocence without compassion can destroy himself and others:

> Did he imagine he could appear in court and try to serve two masters; the one longing for a world of new relationships with people, and the other one . . . clinging desperately to this last remnant, a comeback triumph in court in the jailing of Mike Kon?

By staying away from court, Harry moves toward the world of new relationships where love assumes responsibility for the fate of the other person as Harry ultimately does for Mike.

Once a person has entered into the new dimension of relationship, he experiences a freedom he has never known before. For Michael Aikenhead, the assumption of responsibility so that he can free his father will also free himself. He is no longer oppressed by his involvement in Dave's drowning and by the fear that revelation will destroy his relationship with Anna. He can now approach the freedom and richness of Anna's emotional life:

> She gave herself to everything that touched her, she let herself be, she lost herself in the fulness of the world, and in losing herself she found the world, and she possessed her own soul.

The despair of daily life is transmuted by love into the richness of the more abundant life promised by Christ.

The central theme of Christianity is that God's grace becomes comprehensible

as it is manifested through the divine-human person of Jesus Christ. Men may continue to encounter God's grace mediated by the Holy Spirit through human personality. Many of Callaghan's characters learn new responses through the love and faith of others. Kip Caley reforms under Father Butler's influence and withstands the ultimate test of his reform through the supportive power of Julie's love.

Although the Church is traditionally regarded as the channel of grace, regenerative power does not necessarily flow through it. In so far as the Church admits worldly values, an expedient necessary for its survival as a social force, it diverges from its redemptive vision. It is precisely its officials, the Bishops of *Such Is My Beloved* and *More Joy in Heaven*, those responsible for its temporal welfare, who have least faith in regeneration. The extreme form is represented by Peggy Sanderson's father, who so far compromised his faith with social values that he lost his belief in God. Although some priests, such as Father Butler and Father Dowling, are vehicles of love, they are suspect by the Church hierarchy and by the orthodox and devout. Apparently regenerative power does not flow through the structure of the Church but rather through the individual who, in his interaction with other individuals, mediates divine love and grace.

Such love is at once intensely personal and particular, and redemptive. Although the Bishop is compelled to reject Father Dowling's behaviour and attitude towards the prostitutes, he cannot suppress the suspicion that in this relationship Father Dowling is approaching divine love:

> Father Dowling in the beginning may have loved them in a general way and, of course, that was good. His love for them became too concrete . . . From the general to the particular, the conception expressed in the image . . . From the word to the flesh, from the general to the particular, the word made flesh.

And his thoughts echo the Gospel:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14)

The passage from *Such Is My Beloved* suggests that the Word or message of redemption embodied in Christ might also find expression in the love of a priest (or of a woman such as Anna Prychoda). Similarly it is in Julie's love, not through physical passion but through her reckless commitment to Kip as a person of great intrinsic worth, that his life finally assumes meaning. In the end Kip can comfort her that she has brought him life. Significantly, Father Dowling spends

his lucid moments in the mental institution writing a commentary on The Song of Songs, a highly sensuous book and an epitome of the concrete and particular, which Church Fathers have allegorized to represent Christ's love for the Church.

THE PERSON bringing redemption is not, however, totally identified with Christ. He remains rooted in society and its corruption. Father Dowling, as a priest of the Catholic church, that is in his social role, cannot condone birth control, the only feasible help for the Canzano family, yet he can spend himself in trying to bring a new life to two prostitutes who are the product of homes as inadequate as the Canzanos'. His motives raise doubts. He desires glory, it seems, in winning even the hopeless to God, and he needs to convince himself that he really loves God by loving the dregs of society.

Peggy Sanderson, another "saint", bestows her love on social outcasts, particularly on negroes. Although there is always the suggestion that she is sexually corrupt, she gives many people a sense of her innocence and purity. In fact, Jim McAlpine sees Peggy as a kind of St. Joan, who "lived and acted by her own secret intuitions." It is never clear whether her secret intuitions are the result of special insight or of some abnormal psychopathology arising from her childhood experiences with negroes and from profound disillusionment with her father.

The redemptive person himself needs the regeneration which comes through an existential relationship. By restoring Anna Connel to a fulfilling life, Sam Raymond finds new direction in the apparent dead-end of his own. The same process is suggested when Harry Lane assumes responsibility for Mike Kon, or Anna Prychoda for Michael Aikenhead. Acknowledging that he is his brother's keeper releases the individual from his private bondage and produces the characteristically radical life-vision.

Many of Callaghan's "saints" invite their own destruction. The personal charismatic vision, the living by secret intuitions, challenges the accepted patterns of society. Where Peggy touches one person, she antagonizes many. There is in her relationships the contrast between the church, her purity and wisdom, and the leopard, the destructive forces within her and directed toward her by society. Father Dowling can marvel that so wealthy a man as Mr. Robison could be so fine a Christian. Yet he fails to understand that his chief danger lies with just such Christians whose concept of their own goodness is judged by his ideals.

Kip Caley is destroyed because he does not conform to the preconceived pat-

tern for the returned prodigal. When, through his sense of responsibility to Foley and Kerrmann rather than to social mores, he is involved in the shooting of a policeman, everyone assumes he has betrayed a trust:

> It was necessary that he be hanged in order that their pride and self-respect might be redeemed, that they might be cleansed of their humiliation, and that the pattern of law and order be finally imposed on him.

The social pattern of law and order is the antithesis of the redemption and cleansing made available through the grace of love. Because of the drive to maintain the status quo, Father Dowling is certified insane, Peggy Sanderson is raped and strangled, St. Joan is burned at the stake, and Christ is crucified.

Morley Callaghan rarely presents a dogmatic answer to any problem, or any explicit affirmation of his religious belief. Indeed the ambiguity of many of his characters precludes such a statement. Yet the pattern of regeneration to which he repeatedly turns is firmly rooted in Christian doctrine: man's fundamental involvement in social guilt, the importance of accepting personal responsibility for one's actions, the necessity of regeneration, the crucial role played by self-sacrificing love in regeneration, and the achievement of a new plane of existence characterized by more vital human relationships. Although there is no credo, the patterns of Callaghan's novels are profoundly Christian.